Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: ʿAllāmah Sayyid Saʿīd Akhtār Rizvī

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Maryam	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This second edition volume 6 of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* comprises of the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Āl-Imrān which began in Eng. volume 5 and continues in this volume from verse 42 up to verse 120.

According to the author, it appears that Sūrah Āl-Imrān was revealed when Islam had begun to spread in Arabia but had not yet established a firm foothold outside Medina. The chapter mentions the battle of Uḥud, describes the planned imprecation with the Christians of Najrān; speaks about the Jews and exhorts the believers against the polytheists; and in all these discourses, there is a constant refrain telling them to remain patient and united. It supports the view that this sūrah was revealed at a time when the Muslims were engaged in defense of religion with all their might and when all their resources were devoted to this one task.

In this volume, the author has presented a comprehensive discussion regarding Prophet Jesus, his mother Mary and in particular, the Qur'anic refutation of the Christian concept of Trinity (*tathlith*). The author has also studied the various matters pertaining to Prophet Jesus and the Christian beliefs and dogmas from various angles in seven sections. Included, are two separate discussions of historical nature concerning the Old Testament, the New Testament, Christ and the Four Gospels (Luke, Mathew, Mark and John). All of their different aspects have been carefully analyzed.

The volume comes to an end with the Qur'anic and historical account of the history of the Holy Kaʿbah and other related matters.

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd are thankful to those who took the painstaking task of editing the first Eng. volume (previously published by WOFIS) and to bring this new edition to completion. We hope the readers will welcome this edition with interest.

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Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd
October, 2021

About the Translator

The late ʿAllāmah Sayyid Saʿīd Akhtār Rizvī was one of the most sincere preachers of Islam and an active scholar, both when he was in Tanzania in the Bilāl Muslim Mission (an Islamic organization active in Tanzania), and also when he returned to his own country of India. In the way of spreading Islam he has rendered enormous services and has been most active.

ʿAllāmah Sayyid Saʿīd Akhtār Rizvī had written scores of books and booklets in English, Urdu and Swahili, many of which have been published; and some other titles which have been published by WOFIS. Some of his books have been translated and published by in French, Italian, Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Hausa and other languages.

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imām, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

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1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* (Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism). This book is a comparative

study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 3

Sūrah Āl-Imrān

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Verses 42–60

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(3:42) *And when the angels said: O Mary! surely Allah has chosen and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds.*

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The conjunctive, "And," joins it to the verse 35: *When the woman of ʿImrān said …* Both verses therefore describe the selection of the descendants of ʿImrān mentioned in the verse 34: *Surely God chose Adam...*

This verse proves that Mary was one of "the spoken to"; the angels talked to her and she heard their speech. It is proved also by the words of God in the Chapter of Mary: *then We sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man … He said: "I am only a messenger of your Lord … "* (19:17–21) We shall write, at the end of this Commentary, about "the spoken to".

We have earlier written explaining the Divine Words, *So her Lord accepted her with a good acceptance and made her grow up a good growing* (3:37), that these sentences answer the pleas of Mary's mother: *"And I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring into Thy protection from the accursed Satan"* (3:36); also it was mentioned that the angels' words in the verse under discussion, *"O Mary! surely God has chosen you …,"* show the status which Mary had in proximity to God. You may refer to that explanation for further details. Thus her choosing means that she was accepted a good acceptance for the worship of God; and her purification implies that she held fast to the protection of God. She was therefore

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a chosen one who was protected from sin. It has also been said that her purification means that she was a virgin who did not menstruate—thus she was not obliged to go out of the synagogue at any time. There is nothing wrong in this explanation although the meaning given by us is more in conformity with the context.

… and chosen you above the women of the worlds: We have already described (in the Commentary of the verse 3:33, *Surely Allah chose Adam … above all the worlds*) the connotation of choosing "above" the worlds; "Above" shows that the chosen one was given excellence and precedence over other people in something exclusively given to him; and that it is more than mere selection which implies total surrender to the will of God. The announcement that Mary was chosen "Above the women of the worlds" thus, means that she was given precedence over them.

Was she given precedence over them in all things? Or only in some matters? Look at the following verses:

When the angels said: O Mary! surely Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah. (3:45).

And she who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for the worlds (21:91).

And Mary, the daughter of ʿImrān, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into it of Our Spirit, and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord, and she was of the obedient ones (66:12).

These verses describe the only distinction which she was given to the exclusion of all women of the worlds—and that is her miraculously conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. It shows that it was this aspect of her life in which she was given precedence over all the women. The other qualities attributed to her in these verses (her purification, her acceptance of the words of God and His Books, her obedience to God and her being spoken to) were not her exclusive virtues—they are found in others too.

It is said that she was chosen above the women of her time. But the verse is unconditional and general, and as such it cannot accept any limitation put to it.

يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(3:43) *O Mary! keep to obedience to your Lord and prostrate, and bow down with those who bow.*

al-Qunūt means keeping to obedience with submission and humility;

al-Sajdah (translated here as prostration) is well-known ritual of worship; *al-rukūʿ* (to bow down; to be humble).

When someone calls another person, the called one looks towards the caller and listens to him. In this verse, Mary is again called by name. It is as though the angels wanted to tell her: We have brought to you good news and again some more; you should listen to both of the good tidings. The first concerns with the rank and status you have been given by God. The second is what you are obliged to do alongside that Divine Favor; in other words, what you have got to offer to God of the duties of servitude; it will show your gratitude for that rank and meet the demands of servitude. In this light, this verse, "O Mary! keep to obedience …," seems to branch out from the preceding one, "O Mary! surely God has chosen you …"; that is, because God has chosen you, purified you and chosen you over the women of the worlds, you should keep to obedience to Him and prostrate and bow down with those who bow down. Each of the three orders given in this verse may possibly have emanated from one of the three excellences mentioned in the preceding one—although their respective relationship is not clear.

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ ۚ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُلْقُونَ أَقْلَٰمَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(3:44) ***This is of the tidings of the unseen which we reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mary in his charge, and you were not with them when they contented one with another.***

God has counted it as a tiding of the unseen as He has done after relating the story of Joseph: *This is of the tidings of the unseen (which) we reveal to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans* (12:102). Of course, the scriptures of the People of the Book contain stories about them, but no credence can be attached to them, because they have not remained safe from alterations, deletions and interpolations. For example, a lot of details and particulars given by the Qur'an concerning the story of Zachariah are nowhere to be found in the Bible.

It is probably for this reason that God goes on to say: "And you were not with them when they cast their pens …"

Moreover, the Prophet and his people were unlettered; they had not known these stories, nor had they read them in books, as God says after mentioning the story of Noah: *These are of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you; you did not know them*—(neither) *you nor your people—before this* (11:49). But the first interpretation is more in keeping with the context of the verse.

… and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mary in his charge: *al-Qalam* (pen; plural: *al-aqlām*), also means arrow shaft or arrow which was used for casting lot; in this meaning it is synonymous to *al-Sahm*. Therefore, "when they cast their pens," means, when they cast their arrows to decide by lot which of them should have Mary in his custody. This sentence shows that the contention mentioned in the next phrase, "And you were not with them when they contended one with another," refers to this same conflict which they had about the guardianship of Mary, and that they did not stop arguing with each other until they agreed to decide the matter by lot. They cast the lot and it came out in favor of Zachariah, and he took her charge, as God says: *and gave her into the charge of Zachariah* (3:37).

According to some people, this contention and decision by lot probably occurred when Mary was grown up and Zachariah had become too weak to look after her. Why did this idea occur to them? Probably it was because this contention and its settlement through lot has been mentioned after the story of Mary's birth and her being chosen by God, and also because the guardianship of Zachariah has already been mentioned before. Thus, according to them, this verse refers to another guardianship.

But it is not unusual, while describing an event, to repeat, or to allude to, some of its previously mentioned aspects in order to prove a claim. A similar style has been used in the story of Joseph, where God says at the end: *This is of the tidings of the unseen (which) We reveal to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans* (12:102). This points to their conspiracy which is mentioned at the beginning of the story: *When they said: Certainly Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we, … Slay Joseph or cast him (forth) into some land … A speaker from among them said: Do not slay Joseph, and cast him down into the bottom of the pit if you must do (it), (so that) some of the travelers may pick him up* (12:8–10).

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ

عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(3:45) ***When the angels said: O Mary! surely Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah).***

Evidently it refers to the same event which is mentioned in the Chapter of Mary in these words: *then We sent to her Our Spirit and there appeared to her a well-made man. She said: Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent God, if you are pious. He said: I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy* (19:17–19). The good tiding ascribed to the angels in the verse under discussion is thus attributed here to the Spirit.

It is said that the word "Angels" refers to Gabriel. He has been described with a plural, "Angels," to show his great honor and high rank. People say: He went on a journey riding horses and sailing in ships— while actually he rode one horse and sailed in one ship only. Also, we say: People told him so, while in fact it was only one person who gave him the news. A similar style is seen in the story of Zachariah, mentioned earlier: *Then the angels called to him… He said: Even thus; does Allah what He pleases* (3:39–40).

Others have said that there were other angels with Gabriel and they jointly gave her the good news.

However, if you ponder on the verses which describe the angels, you will see that the angels are of various ranks; some have precedence over others, some are nearer to God than others. Those who are behind are mere followers of the orders of those who are in the forefront. The actions and words of the follower are counted as the actions and the words of the leader himself. It is not different from the activities of our own powers and limbs which are counted as our own activities without there being any duality of doers. We say: My own eyes saw it, my own ears heard it; and the same idea is conveyed when we say: I saw it and heard it. We say: My hand did it; my fingers wrote it; and also we say: I did it, I wrote it. Likewise the deeds and words of the angels of higher ranks are counted as the deeds and words of those of lower rank who follow the former's orders, and vice versa. And similarly the actions and words of all the angels—the leaders and the followers—are attributed to God Himself. Look at the action of giving death: In one place, God attributes it to Himself: *Allah*

takes completely the souls at the time of their death (39:42); another verse ascribes it to the angel of death: *Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you completely* (32:11); and yet another one attributes it to a group of the angels: *until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers take him completely* (6:61).

A similar interchange is seen in the following verses: *Surely We have revealed to you* (4:163); *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart* (26:193–194); *Say: Whoever is the enemy of Gabriel—for surely he revealed it to your heart …* (2:97); *Nay! surely it is an admonishment. So let him who pleases mind it. In honored books, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes, noble, virtuous* (80:11–16).

Now it is clear that the announcement of good news by Gabriel was precisely the announcement by the group of the angels under his authority. And Gabriel is one of the chiefs of the angels, one of those who are nearer to God, as the Divine Words show: *Most surely it is the word of an honored messenger, the possessor of strength, having an honorable place with the Lord of the Throne, one* (to be) *obeyed, and faithful in trust* (81:19–21). We shall explain it further, God willing, under the ch. 35.

You may have a glimpse of the above mentioned reality in the verse: *He said: Even so; Allah creates what He pleases …* (3:47). Apparently the speaker of these words is God, while in ch. 19 the same thing has been attributed to the Spirit: *He (the Spirit) said: I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy. She said: How shall I have a boy and no mortal has touched me, nor have I been unchaste? He said: Even so, your Lord says: It is easy to Me …* (19:19–21).

That the angels and the Spirit talked with Mary, shows that she was one of "the spoken to". Not only this; the earlier quoted words of ch. 19 show that in addition to hearing their speech, she even saw an angel: *then we sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man.* We shall further explain it, God willing, under the Traditions.

… a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary: We have fully explained the significance of the "speech of God," under the verse: *Those apostle, we have made some of them to excel the others* (2:253).

al-Kalimah (word) is a collective noun, one unit of which is called *al-kalim*, as is the case with *al-Tamrah* and *al-Tamr* (date). *al-Kalimah* is used for one meaningful word as well as for a sentence (example, Zayd is standing); also, it is used with equal validity for a phrase or incomplete sentence (example, if Zayd is standing …). This explanation is according

to language. As far as the terminology of the Qur'an is concerned, as for example where it attributes a word to God, it means: 'that which shows the will of God'; it may be an order, e.g., the word of creation when He says to a thing, 'Be'; or it may be a word of revelation and inspiration, etc.

What is the meaning of "A Word from God" when it is applied to Jesus? Some people say: This title was given to Jesus because the prophets who preceded him (or especially the prophets of Israel) had foretold his advent, giving the good news that he would be the savior of Israel. We say in similar situations: This is my word which I had said. And it is in the same meaning that this word has been used by God in connection with the advent of Moses: *and the good word of your Lord was fulfilled in the Children of Israel because they bore up* (sufferings) *patiently* (7:137).

Comment: Although the books of the Bible may support this interpretation, the Qur'an does not subscribe to it. According to the Qur'an, Jesus son of Mary was a prophet who had brought *the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, his name being Aḥmad* (61:6); he was not the one whose good news was given by the others. Moreover, the phrase, "whose name is the Messiah," does not fit this interpretation; because according to this interpretation, "A Word from Him" refers to the advent of Jesus, and not to Jesus himself; while the phrase "whose name is the Messiah," says that the Messiah is the name of the word—and not the name of him in whom the word of God was fulfilled.

Another interpretation: The "Word" refers to Jesus because he explained the Torah giving it the meaning intended by God, pointing out the interpolations and alterations made by the Jews, and clarifying the religious matters in which they had differed. God quotes him as saying to the Children of Israel: … *so that I may take clear to you part of what you differ in* (43:63).

Comment: This interpretation justifies application of the "Word" to Jesus; but there is no association or proof in the Qur'an to support it.

Third interpretation: The "Word" refers to the good news itself; Mary was told that she would conceive Jesus and deliver him. Accordingly, "God gives you good news of a Word from Him," means that God gives you good news that you will give birth to Jesus without the agency of man.

Comment: Obviously, the phrase, "whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary," does not fit this interpretation.

Fourth interpretation: It refers to Jesus because he was the word of creation, that is, the Divine Command, 'Be'. No doubt every man, nay,

every thing, comes into being by the creative word, 'Be'; but every man is conceived and born according to the well-known normal system: the usual course is for the male sperm to fertilize the female ovum—and it requires many main and supporting causes to materialize. That is why conception is attributed to man as its efficient cause—as every effect is attributed to its immediate cause. But conception of Jesus did not follow this course; many usual and gradual causes were simply missing. His existence was just by the creative word, 'Be', and no usual causes intervened. And in this way, he became the "Word" itself, as we see in the verse: *and His Word which He communicated to Mary* (4:171).

It gets support from the verse 3:59, coming at the end: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be , and he was.*

Comment: This is the best of the interpretations.

*al-Masīḥ*ˀ (anointed; wiped clean); Jesus was given this name because he was anointed with success and blessing. Or because he was wiped clean of sins, was purified. Or because he was anointed with holy olive-oil, with which the prophets were anointed. Or because Gabriel wiped him with his wings at his birth, so that it should be a protection from Satan. Or because he used to touch and wipe the heads of the orphans. Or because he used to wipe the eyes of the blind and they gained eye-sight. Or because whenever he touched and wiped any suffering person, he became whole. These are the reasons given by the exegetes for this name.

The fact is that this name was included in the good news given by Gabriel to Mary, as God quotes him as saying: *O Mary! surely Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is al-Masīḥ*ˀ*, Jesus son of Mary.* This word is the Arabicised form of the Meshiha, which is found in the Old and the New Testaments.[1]

The Bible shows that when a king was enthroned among the Children of Israel, the priests anointed him with the holy oil, so that he might be blessed in his rule. The king was therefore called messiah. It may be inferred from it that the messiah means either the king or the blessed one.

It appears from their books that Jesus was called the Messiah because the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament contained the prophecy of his kingdom; it was believed that there would appear in the Children of Israel a

1 The original Hebrew *māshiaḥ* became *mashīḥā* in Aramaic; in Greek, this became messiah, the form now in common use. (Trans.)

king who would deliver them from bondage. The Gospel according to Luke describes the angel's good news to Mary in these words:

> And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that are highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women, And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke, 1:28–33)

And that was the excuse offered by the Jews for not accepting Jesus' claim of prophethood. They said that the good news contained the prophecy of his kingdom and it did not materialize at any time during his life. And it was precisely to overcome this objection that the Christians interpreted the promised kingdom as the spiritual, and not the temporal one. Some Muslim exegetes too have taken the same line.

Author's comment: It is not unlikely that the name *al-Masīḥ*ˀ used in the good news may have meant "the blessed". When they anointed a king with the holy oil, it was done to bring blessings on him. This connotation may be supported by the verses: *He said: Surely I am a servant of Allah, He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: and He has made me blessed wherever I may be …* (19:30–31).

Jesus was originally Yashūᶜ which they interpret as deliverer, savior. Some Muslims' traditions say that it means "he lives". It seems more appropriate in view of the perfect similarity between Jesus and Yaḥyā (John) whose name also means "he lives."[1]

The name Jesus is qualified with the phrase, son of Mary, although the good news was being given to Mary herself. It was done to emphasize the fact that he would be born without the agency of a father, and therefore would be known with this name; and that Mary would jointly share this sign with him. God says: *and made her and her son a sign for the worlds* (21:91).

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1 See the translator's note in vol. 5 under the explanation of the verse 3:39. (Trans.)

… worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah): *al-Wijāhah* (translated here as worthiness of regard) means esteem, prestige, eminence and acceptability. Jesus' eminence and acceptability in this world is not a secret; and the Qur'an confers this position to him in the hereafter too. Undoubtedly Jesus was one of "those who are made near". He is near to God, included in the rank of the friends of God and the near angels in the verse: *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allah, nor do the angels who are near to Him* (4:172). God has explained the importance of being made near to Him, in the ch. 56. He says: *When the great event comes to pass, … and you shall be three sorts And the foremost are the foremost; these are they who are drawn near* (to God) (56:1–11). These verses point to the reality of the nearness to God: Man presses forward leaving others behind in the way that leads one back to God, then he comes nearer to God. Proceeding on this way is prescribed for every man, nay, everything. God says: *O man! surely thou art striving to thy Lord, a hard striving, so that thou art to meet Him* (84:6). Also, He says: *now surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come* (42:53).

There is another aspect to this reality. Nearness to God is an attribute of some angels. It means that this nearness is not necessarily a thing to be acquired by one's endeavors; whatever it is a gift from God. It may therefore be said that it is a rank it is a gift from God. It may therefore be said that it is a rank and status which the angels get by Divine bestowal and the men by their striving.

The expression, "worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter" is a circumstantial phrase; and so are other words in conjunctive with it, that is, "And of those who are made near"; "And he shall speak"; "And one of the good ones"; "And He will teach him …"; "And a messenger."

وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(3:46) ***And he shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of mature age, and (he shall be) one of the good ones.***

al-Mahd (cradle; bed or cot for infant, especially one on rockers). *al-Kahl* (one of mature age) is derived from *al-kuhūlah* (to be of mature age); it is the middle age between youth and old age, it is the time when the body is at the height of its perfection and strength. That is why it is said that middle age is when white hair mixes with black. Others say that

mature age means the age of forty-three.

In any case, it was a prophecy that he would live until he reached middle age; it was another good news for Mary.

The Gospels say that he did not live on the earth more than thirty-three years. And yet the Qur'an clearly talks about his middle age. It is a point to be pondered upon. It is because of this that some people have said that his middle age speech would occur after his coming down from the heaven—because he was not on the earth till his middle age. Some others have claimed that according to "historical research" Jesus lived for about sixty-four years, contrary to what the Gospels say. But the expression, "when in the cradle and when of mature age," shows that he would not reach old age—his life on this earth would end in his middle age. In other words, the verse gives us both sides of his age—the infancy and the middle age.

Usually a child is put in cradle in the beginning of its life when it is in diapers, before it starts crawling or walking—generally in its second year or even before; and it is the age when it starts talking. Therefore, for a child to speak in cradle is not an extraordinary achievement. But the verse obviously has another importance: It means that he would speak to the people, when in the cradle, a complete and thought provoking speech which men of understanding would listen to, as they listen to the talk of a middle-aged man. In other words, he would talk to them in his cradle in the same manner as he would do in his mature age. Surely such a talk from an infant is extraordinary sign, a miracle.

Apart from that, the story as given in the ch. 19, clearly shows that he had spoken to the people in the very first hour of his life, when Mary brought him to them soon after his birth. And undoubtedly when a child talks on the day he is born, it must be a miracle. God says: *And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: O Mary! surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron! your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman. But she pointed to him. They said: How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle? He said: Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: And he has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and zakāt (poor rate) so long as I live: And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblessed: And peace on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life* (19:27–33).

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ ۖ قَالَ كَذَٰلِكِ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ
مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾

(3:47) ***She said: My Lord! how shall there be a son (born) to me and no man has touched me? He said: Even so; Allah creates what He pleases; when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it: 'Be,' and it is.***

She addressed her talk to the Lord, although it was the Spirit in the form of a well-made man who was talking to her. It was based on the earlier explained reality that the talk of the angels and Spirit is in fact the talk of God. She knew that it was God who was talking to her although the talk occurred through the agency of the Spirit or the angels. That is why she expressed her perplexity to her Lord.

Also, it is possible to look at this sentence as a cry for help. In that case, it will be a sentence in parenthesis, somewhat similar to the expression: *he says: Send me back, my Lord, send me back* (23:99).

He said: Even so; Allah creates what He pleases when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is: We have described earlier the syntactic position of the word, "Even so." We have shown that, putting this reply by the side of the verse 19:21 (*He said: Even so; your Lord says: It is easy to Me: and that we may make him a sign to men and a mercy from Us; and it is a matter which has been decreed*), it may be inferred that the word, "Even so," is a complete sentence, implying: Even so is the matter. That is, what you have been told is a matter which has been decreed; nothing can avert it.

As for her astonishment, it could only be in place if the matter was beyond the power of God, or very difficult for Him to do. So far as His power is concerned, it is unlimited, He does whatever He pleases. And as for difficulty it is imaginable only where the matter depends on preliminaries and causes—the more numerous and more formidable the causes and preliminaries, the more difficult that matter. But God does not create, what He creates, with the help of the causes; "when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is."

It is thus evident that the word, "Even so," is a complete sentence meant to remove the perplexity of Mary; the next sentence, "God creates what He pleases," aims at getting rid of the possible misunderstanding about God's

power; and lastly the sentence, "when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is," removes the delusion of difficulty and hardship.

وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَاةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(3:48) ***And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl.***

The definite articles, in "the Book" and "the Wisdom," denote the genes of the Book and the Wisdom. The Book, as explained earlier refers to revelation which removes the people's differences. The Wisdom is the useful knowledge related to the belief and action. Now the Torah and the Injīl (Gospel) themselves were books containing Wisdom. Yet, the Spirit or the angels mentioned them separately after the Book and the Wisdom. Sometimes a particular person or thing is mentioned after description of its genes, because that thing is important enough to deserve separate mention. The definite article in "the Book" is not for comprehensiveness. In other words, it does not say that Jesus was taught all the book, all the revelation. God says: *And when Jesus came with clear arguments, he said: I have come to you indeed with Wisdom, and so that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in; so fear Allah and obey me* (43:63). Note the word, "part of" we have written about it earlier.

When the Qur'an mentions the Torah, it refers to the revelation which God had sent down to Moses inscribed on the tablets when he was on the Mount Sinai, as God describes in the ch. 7, that is, "The Battlements." As for the books presently in the hands of the Jews, they themselves admit a big vacuum and void, a large gap, in its chain of narrators between the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and Cyrus, King of Persia. Nevertheless, the Qur'an confirms that the Torah which was with the Jews in the days of the Prophet was not altogether different from the original Torah—although it had been altered and interpolated to a great extent. The Qur'anic verses clearly show these facts.

As for the Injīl—and it means "good news"—the Qur'an says that it was a single book that was revealed to Jesus, it was therefore a revelation sent especially to him. God says: *and He revealed the Torah and the Injīl aforetime, a guidance for the people* (3:3–4). But the present Gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were admittedly written and composed long after Jesus.

The Qur'an also shows that the Law was only in the Torah; the Injīl

did not bring any new shariah, except that it abrogated some rules of the Torah. God says in the verses under discussion: "And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you." Again He says: *and We gave him the Injīl in which was guidance and light, and verifying what was before it of Torah, and a guidance and an admonition for those who guard* (against evil). *And the people of the Injīl should have judged by what Allah revealed in it* (5:46–47). It may be inferred from this verse that there were some affirmative rules too in the Injīl.

The Qur'an also shows that the Injīl, like the Torah, contained the good news of the advent of the Prophet, God says: *Those who follow the Messenger Prophet, the ummī, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Injīl* (7:157).

وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ
لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۖ
وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۖ وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا
تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(3:49) ***And (make him) a messenger to the Children of Israel: 'That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead ones to life with Allah's permission, and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses; most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers.***

Evidently Jesus was sent particularly to the Children of Israel; and the verses concerning Moses imply the same thing about him. But while writing on the subject of prophethood, under the verse: *Mankind was but one people; so Allah sent the prophets …* (2:213); we have explained that Jesus, like Moses, was one of the *ulu al-ʿAzm* prophets, who were sent to

the whole world.[1]

This problem may be solved if you look at the difference between a messenger and a prophet written there. It was mentioned that a prophet conveys to his people what is good for them in this world and the hereafter; and an apostle brings to them a special message which decides between the people with truth and finality—either providing them with eternal blissful life or bring to them destruction and perdition, as has been described in the words of God: *And every nation had a messenger; so when their messenger came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly* (10:47).

In other words, a prophet is a man who is sent to explain the religion to the men, while a messenger is sent to convey a special message whose rejection brings destruction and perdition in its wake, and whose acceptance bestows eternity and bliss.[2] This idea gets strengthened if we ponder on the messages given by the messengers (like: Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb and others, peace of God be on them) to their nations, and which are quoted in the Qur'an.

This being the case, being a messenger to a particular nation does not necessarily mean that he was sent as prophet to them only. Possibly a messenger sent to a particular nation could have been appointed as prophet to that nation together with other people—as was the case with Moses and Jesus.

We find in the Qur'an evidence in support of the above views. For Example, Moses was sent to Pharaoh, as God said to him: *Go to Pharaoh, surely he has exceeded all limits* (20:24); and the magicians of the Pharaoh's nation believed in Moses; evidently their belief was accepted by God although they too were not from the Children of Israel, as God says: *they said: We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses* (20:70). Likewise, the call to the Divine Religion was addressed to the whole nation of Pharaoh: *And certainly We tried before them the people of Pharaoh, and there came to them a noble messenger* (44:17).

A similar phenomenon is seen about Jesus. Before the appearance of the Prophet, there had entered into the religion of Jesus a multitude of non-Israelites, like the Romans, the Franks, the Austrians, the Prussians and the Anglo-Saxons in the West, and the tribe of Najrān in the East.

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1 See *al-Mīzān,* vol. 3. (Trans.)

2 *Ibid*. (Trans.)

And when the Qur'an speaks about the Christians, it does not single out the Israelite Christians. When it says something for or against them, it covers all Christians—Israelites and non-Israelites alike.[1]

That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead ones to life with Allah's permission: *al-Khalq* (to create; to assemble the parts of a thing). This verse ascribes creation to someone other than God; the same idea is implied by the verse: *so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators* (23:14).

al-Akmah (one who is born blind). al-Rāghib says that it is sometimes used for one who has lost his eyesight, that is, as synonymous to blind. It is said: His eyes *kamahat* (lost their sight until they became white).

al-Abras means one having *al-bars* (leprosy, a well-known skin disease).

He (Jesus) said, "And bring the dead ones to life," using the plural. It proves, or at least hints, that he brought to life many dead persons. And he said, "with God's permission," to make it clear that these miraculous signs appearing on his hands were actually attributed to God, not that he had any independent power to do so. He went on repeating this phrase to put utmost emphasis on this aspect.

There was a real danger of people believing him to be a god—because of these miracles. That is why he repeatedly added the proviso, "with God's permission," after every miracle which could confuse and mislead the people, like creation of bird, and bringing the dead to life. And it was

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1 This argument seems inconclusive. Jesus himself said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew, 15:23); and when he sent his Apostles to spread the Divine Message, he expressly forbade them to go to non-Israelites: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and unto the city of the Samaritans enter you not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew, 10:5–6). But St. Paul, who had never seen Jesus in his life, overruled the Apostles who had spent their time with Jesus and were privy to his ideas and ideals. Thus, St. Paul took Christianity to non-Israelites; and this transplantation bore out such fruits which could never be palatable to Jesus himself. Clearly, we cannot bring in evidence an action of St. Paul (or more precisely, the fruit of that action) which was diametrically opposed to a clear instruction of Jesus (Trans.)
Note: The translator's comment here is based on the assumption that the reports in the present gospels are correct. (Pub.)

because of this very reason that he ended his talk saying: *Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path.*

The verse, "that I create for you …" apparently means that these miracles had actually happened on his hands; it was not just a talk, nor just a challenge. Had he wanted only to tell them that he had got that power—just to complete his argument against them—he would have added some proviso like, "if you ask for it," or "if you so desire".

Moreover, the talk that God will have on the Day of Resurrection with Jesus clearly shows that these miracles had actually happened: *When Allah will say: O Jesus son of Mary! remember My favor on you and on your mother … and when you created out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leper by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead ones by My permission…* (5:110).

Some people have said: Utmost that can be proved from these verses is that God had given him this power, and that he mentioned that power when he argued with the people. Thus, he completed his proof against them, because he would have shown those miracles, if they had asked for them. But it does not prove that all or some of these miracles did actually happen.

Comment: The explanation given by us and the Divine Speech on the Day of Resurrection make it abundantly clear that all these miracles did actually take place, and that it is absolutely wrong to cast any doubt on them.

… and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses: This is news of the unseen which is reserved for God and his messengers who knew it by Divine Revelation. It is another miracle, an information of the unseen which was beyond any doubt or confusion—man, after all, cannot have any doubt about what he has eaten or has stored in his house.

This miracle does not have the proviso, "by permission of God," although no miracle can take place without God's permission. God Himself says: *and it was not meet for a messenger that he should bring a sign except with Allah's permission* (40:78). The reason of this omission lies in the verb "inform". Jesus was to give them those informations; it would be a speech emanating from Jesus. In other words, it was Jesus' action, and as such was not worthy of being attributed to God, in contrast to the preceding two signs, i.e., creation and bringing the dead to life, which are really the actions of God and cannot be attributed to anyone else except

by His permission.

Moreover, these two signs were not like giving those informations. They had more potentiality of leading people astray, when compared to his informing them of what they ate and what they kept in store. Simple minded people can very easily accept the Godhead of a creator of birds and resurrector of dead, rather than the divinity of one who gives them the news of the unseen. Common people do not think that the knowledge of the unseen is exclusively reserved for God; they think that it is not so difficult an art and may be attained to by any magician through training and practice. That is why Jesus found it necessary, when talking to them, to put the condition of God's permission, on the two signs, and not on this last one. The same is the case of healing; it was sufficient just to mention, as he did in the beginning, that it was "A sign from your Lord"; and especially when he was talking with the people who claimed to be believers. That is why he ended his talk with the words, *most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers,* that is, if you are truthful in your claim that you are a believer.

وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَلِأُحِلَّ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ
عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٥٠﴾

(3:50) ***And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you, and I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, therefore fear Allah and obey me.***

It is in conjunction with "And a messenger to the Children of Israel." Of course, this phrase is in the first person (that is, spoken by Jesus,) while the former is in the third person (that is, spoken by the Spirit); but it makes no difference because the former, that is, "And a messenger …," has been immediately explained by Jesus in the following words: "That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord …"; and this has changed the mode from the third to the first person—and this makes the conjunction perfect.

He came as a verifier of the Torah; he verified the Torah which was revealed before him and which he was taught by God, as the preceding verse says. In other words, he verified the original Torah which was given to Moses. This phrase, therefore, does not show that he verified the Torah which was with the Jews in his time, nor does it imply that the Torah of

his days was unaltered. The same applies to the verification of the Torah by our Prophet.

… and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you: God had forbidden them some of the good things, as He says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them …* (4:160).

This talk shows that Jesus had endorsed the laws of the Torah with exception of some tough rules prescribed for them in the Torah, which he abrogated. That is why it is said that the Injīl does not contain a new shariah.

The phrase, "And that I may allow you …," is in conjunction with, the phrase, "with a sign from your Lord"; the preposition, *li* (that), describes the purpose; the sentence therefore means: I have come to you for the purpose of abrogating some of the hard rules imposed on you in the Torah.

… and I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, therefore fear Allah and obey me: Apparently, this is to make it clear that the following phrases, "therefore fear God and obey me," are based on his bringing a sign from God, and not on his allowing some of the forbidden things. It is to remove this possible misunderstanding that the phrase, "And I have come to you with a sign from your Lord," has been repeated.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۗ هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٥١﴾

(3:51) ***Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path.***

Jesus said it in order to cut off the excuse of those who were to believe in his divinity—either because he had detected such tendency in them or because he was informed through revelation of these future happenings. It was a sincere attempt to remove all chances of misunderstandings, as he had done when he added the proviso, "with God's permission," while talking about creating a bird and bringing the dead ones to life. But it appears from his talk on the Day of Judgment as quoted by the Qur'an in the verse 5:117 (*I did not say to them aught save what Thou didst enjoin me with: That worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord …*), that he had said it in pursuance of the order of God and His revelation.

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَىٰ مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ قَالَ

الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(3:52) ***But when Jesus perceived unbelief on their part, he said: Who are my helpers to Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers of Allah: We believe in Allah and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones.***

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The narration leaves unsaid his life story from his conception to the early days of his mission, because its important milestones had already been mentioned in the good news given to Mary. That is why this verse picks up the thread of narration from the point when Jesus, after announcing his mission and showing the aforesaid miracles, faced resistance from his people. It describes how he selected his disciples, how his people planned against him, and how God defeated their conspiracy by purifying him, taking him away to Himself and making him to ascend to Him. And thus the story ends.

The narrative throws light on those aspects only which were immediately needed for clarifying the subject matter to the Christians of Najrān, whose delegation was then at Medina for discussion and argument. That is why many other points of the story, mentioned in the Chapters of: The Women, The Table, The Prophets, The Embellishment and The Ranks, have been omitted in this one. The use of the word, perception or sense, in connection with unbelief—although disbelief is a matter pertaining to heart—implies that their disbelief was so transparent that it could be perceived by external senses. It could alternatively mean that when they, because of their disbelief, planned to harm and kill him, he sensed it and in this way perceived their disbelief. The verse therefore means: When Jesus perceived, that is, felt, sensed and noticed the unbelief of the Children of Israel—whose name was mentioned in the good news given to Mary—he said: "Who are my helpers to God?" He asked this question as he wanted to distinguish and set apart a selected group of his people who would be solely dedicated to truth; they would strengthen the power of religion and form the nucleus around which the structure of religion would be built—they would be the centre from which the Divine Religion would spread. We find this phenomenon in every physical, social and other powers: When a party begins its activities, it finds it necessary to take for itself a core of dedicated cadre, on which it gets its strength. Otherwise, it could not pursue its activity and would become useless. In Islamic history, the

same phenomenon is seen in the pledges of allegiance of the mountain pass and the tree. The Messenger of God's aim in the two pledges was to concentrate the full strength of Islam, reinforcing its power, in order that the Divine Mission could spread and succeed.

Thus Jesus became sure that his mission was not succeeding in the Children of Israel—in a major part of them—and that they were not ready to believe in him no matter what he did. He was afraid that if they succeeded in destroying his life, the mission would fail and the difficulties would increase. Therefore, he wanted to make arrangements as a safeguard against that eventuality. He sought help of a selected group in proceeding towards God. The disciples answered his call and thus were distinguished from among the whole nation by their belief. It paved the way to distinguish belief from disbelief, by making the faith victorious over faithlessness, spreading his mission and establishing proofs. God says: *O you who believe! be helpers of Allah, as Jesus son of Mary said to (his) disciples: Who are my helpers to Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers of Allah. So a party of the Children of Israel believed and another disbelieved; then we aided those who believed against their enemy, and they became uppermost* (61:14).

Jesus qualified his question, "Who are my helpers," with the phrase, "to God".[1] He did so to awaken their longing and arouse their eagerness to proceed towards God, to be near Him. And this was the real reason for asking this question. The same was the idea behind the question, *Who is it that will lend to Allah, a goodly loan …* (2:245). It is the preposition "to," in "my helpers to God," which implies the meaning of going or proceeding, etc. A similar connotation is found in the declaration of Abraham as quoted in the Qur'an: *Surely I go to my Lord: He will guide me* (37:99).

Some commentators have said that "to" in the above sentence means "with"; the question according to them means: Who are my helpers with God? But there is no evidence to support this explanation. Moreover, it is against the manners of the Qur'an to count God in line with others. The Qur'an cannot count others as the helpers when it counts God as the

1 It is worth noting here that there is not a single example in the Qur'an where a prophet has been mentioned as the believers' helper while its opposite is correct. The help which is given by God is the help in religion. Thus the believers are exhorted to help their prophet, implying proceeding on the way leading to God by following and obeying their prophet. (Ed.)

Helper. Nor is it in conformity with the manners of Jesus which shines so brightly everywhere in his narrative in the Qur'an. Furthermore, the reply of the disciples too does not support this interpretation. In case this meaning were correct, the disciples should have said: 'We are your helpers with God.' (Think over it).

The disciples said: We are helpers of Allah: We believe in Allah and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones: A man's *al-ḥawāriyy* is the one exclusively attached to him. It is reportedly derived from *al-ḥawr* (intense whiteness; marked contrast between the white of the corona and the black of the iris). The Qur'an has not used this word except for the close companions of Jesus.

The sentence: "We believe in God," is a sort of explanation of their former declaration, "We are helpers of God". This too supports the above explanation that Jesus' phrase, "my helpers to God," implies proceeding on the way leading to God, because true belief is the prescribed way.

Was it their first entry into the circle of faith? Obviously not. The wordings used in verse 61:14 (*Jesus son of Mary said to (his) disciples: Who are my helpers to Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers of Allah. So a party of the Children of Israel believed*), show that it was a belief after belief. And there is nothing strange in it, as we have already explained that the *īmān* and *islām* are of various ranks, one upon the other.[1]

Going a step further, look at the verse: *And when I revealed to the disciples, saying: Believe in Me and My messenger, they said: We believe and be our witness that we are the submitting ones* (5:111). It clearly shows that this reply of theirs was based on a revelation from God; in other words, they were prophets. Therefore, the belief referred to in their reply was a belief after belief.

Proceeding further, we find them saying: … *and be our witness that we are submitting ones. Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger; so write us down with those who bear witness.* The *islām* or submission to which they have referred, is unconditional surrender and submission to all that God demands from them and desires for them. This too implies that it was not the initial belief, but a belief after belief, because such submission is not found except in the sincere believers; it is not within the reach of those who merely bear witness to the Oneness of God and the prophethood of the Prophet. We have earlier

1 See *al-Mīzān* Eng. vol. 2 (Ed.)

explained in detail that every stage of *īmān* is preceded by a relevant stage of *islām*. Their words: "We believe in God and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones," also point to this very fact: They used the verb for belief (implying a new occurrence) and adjective for submission (implying a sort of permanence). The first stage of *islām* is submission and generally bearing witness to the basic of religion. This is followed by a heartfelt belief in the above testimony in principle. Then comes the second stage of *islām* and that is the sincere submission to the meaning of the said belief. When this stage comes, all possibilities are removed of anger or annoyance with what God and His messenger has ordered. In other words, the believer puts in practice the tenets of religion. It is followed by the second stage of *īmān*. This is the stage when deeds become sincere and the attributes of servitude are deeply ingrained in all actions and activities. This is followed by the third stage of *islām* which means surrender to the love of God and to His will; such a Muslim does not love anything except because of God and does not want anything except for God; then nothing happens on his hands except that which God loves and desires, and the man's own love and desire are completely forgotten. It is followed by the third stage of *īmān*, when this servile submission permeates all his actions and deeds.

Keep in view this short description of the stages of *islām* and *īmān*. Then ponder on the call of Jesus as he said: "therefore fear God and obey me. Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path". Note that he first told them to fear God and to obey him. And he gave the reason of that order, in these words, "Surely God is my Lord and your Lord". That is, God is your Lord, O people of my nation, and He is also the Lord of His messenger whom He has sent to you. Therefore, it is obligatory for you to fear Him by believing in Him, and to obey me by following me. In short, you are obliged to worship and serve Him with piety and His fear, obeying His messenger, that is, with belief and following. This much is clearly understood from his words. That is why the fear of God and obedience of the prophet have been changed to the phrase, "therefore worship Him"; He effected this change to make it clear that this order and this affair is attributed to God, and that attribution becomes crystal clear in the worship. Then he said that this worship is a straight path—it is a way that leads the walker to God.

After issuing that call, he perceived their disbelief, and he felt that there was no ground for hoping that their general public would accept true faith. Therefore, he said: "Who are my helpers to God?" He was seeking

helpers for proceeding on this straight path to which he had invited the people. That is the path of servitude—the piety and obedience. The disciples answered his call accepting the same thing he had asked for. They said: "We are helpers of God." Then they proceeded to explain it in these words: "We believe in God and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones." The submission here refers to their obedience and following. It was for this reason that when they humbly and beseechingly spoke to their Lord, telling Him what they had promised Jesus, they changed the word, submission, to the following; and expanded the circle of belief to cover all that was revealed by God. They said: *Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger.*

It means that they believed in all that God had revealed, and in what He had taught Jesus son of Mary of the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl, and they followed the messenger in this matter. You will appreciate that it is among the highest ranks of belief, not its lower ones.

The disciples did not say: "We believe in God and we are submitting ones." Instead they asked Jesus to be their witness regarding their submission and following. They did so in order that they should have a proof when they spoke to their Lord and said: *Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger.* It was as though they said: Our Lord! This is our condition and Thy messenger is our witness for it.

رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(3:53) *Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger; so write us down with those who bear witness.*

It is direct quotation of what the disciples said—without using an introductory phrase, like, 'They said.' This dramatic style of the Qur'an (as we have mentioned somewhere) puts the audience in a position where they seem to hear the words directly from the speakers—not through a narrator. They asked their Lord to write them down with those who bear witness. And they based this prayer on their *islām* and *īmān* both. A messenger conveys his message when he explains what God has revealed to him—both in words and in practice. He teaches the tenets of religion and himself acts upon them. Those who shall bear witness that the messenger conveyed the Divine Message to his people shall do so by learning the message from the messenger and following him in the shariah. In this way, it

will be seen that the messenger himself practices what he tells others to do—he does not ignore it nor does he transgress it.

Apparently, this witnessing refers to their testimony that the messenger had truly conveyed the message, as God says in the verse: *Most certainly then We will question those to whom (the messengers) were sent, and most certainly We will question the messengers* (7:6). As for the witnessing mentioned in the verse 5:83 (*And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize; they say: Our Lord! we believe, so write us down with the witnesses.*), it refers to bearing witness for the truth of the messengership not for conveying the message. And God knows better.

Another possible explanation: They had asked the messenger to be witness for their *islām;* thereafter they prayed to God to write them down with those who bear witness. Probably they wanted God to write them among those who shall bear witness for deeds, as appears from the prayer of Abraham and Ishmael quoted in the Qur'an: *Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee, and show us our ways of devotion …* (2:128). Refer to what we have written under that verse for details.[1]

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وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ ۖ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(3:54) *And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners.*

The planners were the Children of Israel, as appears from the preceding verse, "But when Jesus perceived unbelief on their part …" We have explained under the verse 2:26 (… *but He does not cause to err by it (any) except the transgressors*) what planning means when it is attributed to God.

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَىٰ إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(3:55) *And when Allah said: O Jesus! I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of*

1 See *al-Mīzān* Eng. vol. 2 (Ed.)

those who disbelieve, and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.

al-Tawaffī is to take something completely. It is for this reason that it is also used for death, because at the time of death God takes man's soul away from his body. See, for example, the following verses:

… *Our messengers take him completely* (6:61), that is, cause him to die. *And they say: What! when we have become lost in the earth, shall we then indeed be in a new creation? … Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you completely* (that is, cause you to die), *then to your Lord you shall be brought back* (32:10–11); *Allah takes completely the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep, then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term …* (39:42).

Pondering on the last two verses you will see that the Qur'an has not used *al-tawaffī* in the meaning of death, rather the word gives the idea of taking and preserving. In other words, when *al-tawaffī* is used for death, it is not because it means death; rather it is used to emphasize the connotation of taking and preserving, to show and establish that man's soul does not perish, is not destroyed by death—contrary to what ignorant people think; God keeps and preserves it until comes the time to return it to its body for resurrection. At other places where this sense is not involved, God uses the word *al-mawt* (death) and not *al-tawaffī*. For example: *And Muḥammad is no more than a messenger, the messengers had already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels?* (3:144); … *it shall not be finished with them entirely so that they should die …* (35:36).

There are a lot of other verses of this type, not excepting some verses in Jesus' story itself: For example, there are, Jesus' words about himself: *And peace be on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life* (19:33); and God's words about him: *And there is not one of the people of the Book but most certainly shall believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he (Jesus) shall be a witness against them* (4:159).

It all shows that *al-tawaffī* does not necessarily mean death.

This interpretation is also supported by the words of God refuting

the claim of the Jews: *And their saying: Surely we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of Allah; and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so; and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture; and they killed him not for sure. Rather, Allah took him up to Himself; and Allah is Mighty, Wise. And there is not one of the people of the Book but most certainly shall believe in him* (that is, Jesus) *before his death and on the Day of Resurrection he* (that is, Jesus) *shall be a witness against them* (4:157–159).[1] The Jews claimed that they had killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, and likewise the Christians think that the Jews had killed Jesus son of Mary by crucifixion, and that after he was crucified God raised him up from his grave to the heaven, as the Gospels say. But the Qur'anic verses, as you see, unequivocally refute the story of killing and crucifixion both.

It is apparent from the Divine Words, *And there is not one of the people of the Book …*, that Jesus is alive near God and that he will not die until all the people of the Book shall believe in him. Keeping all these factors in view, the word *al-tawaffī,* used in the verse under discussion, would only mean that God was to take him away completely from among the Jews. Yet the verse does not say so clearly; it is only its apparent connotation. (We shall write in detail on this subject at the end of the fourth Chapter, The Women.)

And cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve: *al-Rafᶜ* (to raise, to cause to ascend) is opposite of *al-wadᶜ* (to put down); *al-ṭahārah* (cleanliness, purity) is opposite of *al-qadhārah* (dirtiness, impurity). We have already explained the meaning of cleanliness. The phrase, "cause you to ascend," is qualified by the word, "unto Me"; and it implies that the ascension was spiritual, rather than physical; because God has no place like the physical spaces in which a body or things related to body arrive, stay or settle down, and from which they depart or to which they come nearer. Accordingly, this phrase will have the same connotation as the words at the end of this very verse have: *then to Me shall be your return.* This interpretation will be strengthened if *al-tawaffī* is taken to mean "to cause to die"; because in that case, "to cause to ascend to Me" would imply raising his rank and taking him nearer to God. Its meaning will, then, be similar to the verse 3:169, wherein God says about those who

1 The verse 4:159 has been explained in detail in *al-Mīzān* Eng. vol. 8. (Pub.)

are martyred in His way: *they are alive near their Lord;* and the verse 19:57, where He says about Idrīs: *And We raised him to a high station.*

Another interpretation: The ascension refers to his being raised alive with his body and soul together to the heaven; because the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses suggest that the heaven—that is, the physical one—is the place of nearness to God, the venue from which the Divine favors and blessings are sent down, and where the honored angels live. Probably, we shall discuss the meaning of *al-Samā'* (sky, heaven) somewhere else, God willing.

Purification from the unbelievers, as it is preceded by ascension to God, implies spiritual, rather than physical purification. Accordingly, it means that God would keep him away from the unbelievers, protect him from mingling with them, and remove him from their society—the society that is polluted by their unbelief and rejection of truth.

And make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection: In this verse God gives a promise that He will surely make the followers of Jesus prevail over his adversaries who disbelieved in his prophethood, and that this predominance will continue up to the Day of Resurrection. This verse distinguishes the superior group from the inferior one, saying that the superior ones are those who follow Jesus and the opposite group is that of the unbelievers—without mentioning that they were from the Children of Israel, or that they were the Jews who professed to follow the shariah of Moses or pointing to them in any other way.

Of course, looking at the fact that his adversaries have been defined as unbelievers, it appears that "those who follow you" refers to the following in the way of truth, a following that is approved by God and which He is pleased with. Accordingly, his followers would be those Christians who did not deviate from his straight path before Islam came to abrogate Jesus' religion; and after the advent of Islam it is the Muslims who are his followers—because only these two groups are his followers in the path of truth. If so, then the promised superiority would mean their superiority in their arguments and proofs, not their material domination or their rule over his adversaries. The meaning thus will be as follows: The proof of your followers, that is, the above mentioned Christians and the Muslims, shall be victorious over the proof of those who disbelieve in you, that is, the Jews, up to the Day of Resurrection.

The above was the explanation given and chosen by the exegetes. But I think that the verse does not support this interpretation either explicitly

or implicitly. Evidently the whole sentence, "I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve, and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection," is news of what was to happen in the future: His being taken away, his ascension to God, his purification from disbelievers and the domination of his followers over unbelievers— all was to happen sometimes after God had given him this news. Moreover, the words, "And make those who follow you above those who disbelieve," contain a promise and a good tiding, and good tiding always refer to some future event. And it is known that the proof of the Jesus' followers is nothing but the proof of Jesus himself. These are the very proofs which were mentioned in the good news given to Mary. And those proofs had certainly gained ascendancy over those of the unbelievers, both when Jesus was present before his ascension, as well as after his ascension. It may rather be said that before his ascension those proofs were more decisive and more convincing in the face of his adversaries' claims than they were after his ascension. This being the case, what is the meaning of a promise that his followers' proofs would overcome those of his adversaries—in future? Again, why should this dominance be limited "to the Day of Resurrection" only? If a proof is victorious and convincing it should remain so for all times, without any limitation of time or day. Moreover, victory of a true proof over false ones will be even more manifest on the Day of Resurrection, as the Qur'an informs us in connection of that Day's happenings.

A suggestion: Perhaps predominance of proof means that it would be more popular, more widely accepted—people would heed more to it, would accept it more readily; in this way their number would increase, and their power be more formidable.

Comment: Does it mean that his true followers would prevail over the disbelievers, would rule over them and overwhelm them with their power? But the fact is otherwise. It is no use saying that it may be a good news which would come true in distant future in the last days of the world, because the wordings of the verse do not allow such delay.

Or does it mean predominance in number? That is, his followers—the followers of truth after Jesus—would be more numerous than the followers of falsehood? But reality belies it. The followers of falsity have always been in majority, and the people of truth always in minority, right from the time of Jesus up to these days of ours—a long period of two millennia. Moreover, the wordings of the verse do not support this interpretation

either. Look at the context; the verse gives Jesus the good news that God's displeasure was to descend on the Jews, that they were to be overwhelmed by Divine Anger. In this background, the predominance of his followers conforms more with his followers' hold and dominance over his adversaries—either through convincing proofs or through rule and domination. But in no way does it point to the majority in number.

Let us have a fresh look at this verse: It distinguishes the two groups with two verbs: "those who follow you," and "those who disbelieve". The verb shows that an action has taken or will take place within the framework of a time—past, present or future. The implication would differ if these phrases were changed to adjectives: "followers" and "disbelievers"; because adjectives show a more or less permanent attribute which transcends time limits, the said attribute is found in its related thing or person at all times. Suppose there is a group of people who do something good or bad, and the rest of the nation is pleased with it, even the coming generations agree with what their ancestors did, then this much ideological identity and psychological identification are enough to ascribe that action or thing to the whole nation. For example, the Qur'an admonishes the Jews and condemns them because of their ancestors' actions like hurting and slaying the prophets, their arrogance in face of the commands of God and His messengers, their alterations and interpolations in the Book of God and many other things like that.

In view of the above mentioned two principles, "those who disbelieve" may be interpreted as the whole Jewish nation; and "those who follow you" may mean all the Christians because their early fathers had believed in and followed Jesus—and it was a correct belief and true following—although God was not pleased with those among them who believed in the trinity before Islam, nor was He pleased with the whole nation when they continued to follow Jesus even after the advent of Islam.

The sentence therefore means that God was to make the Christians whose ancestors had truly followed Jesus—dominant over the Jews because they had disbelieved in Jesus and had planned and conspired against him.

The aim is to show that God's wrath has descended on the Jews, and His severe chastisement has engulfed their nation. (We have explained above that the early Christians had truly followed Jesus; and therefore the whole Christian nation may be included in the phrase, "those who follow you".)

Going further, we find the phraseology changed. Instead of saying

"those who follow you," God says: "And as to those who believe and do good deeds …" This too supports our interpretation that "those who follow you" covers all the Christians, irrespective of their present belief and behavior. It does not mean only the Muslims and those Christians who had correct belief and had truly followed Jesus. In short, it is not confined to those who will be saved in the hereafter. Otherwise, God would have continued the earlier mode of expression and said: "And as to those who follow you, He will pay them fully their rewards."

Another interpretation: "Those who follow you" covers all the Christians and all the Muslims; and the verse foretells that up to the Day of Resurrection the Jews would always remain under the domination of those who believe and that it is obligatory to follow Jesus—and the basis of the explanation is the same as above. And it is the best of the interpretations written for this verse.

… then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed: This talk is addressed jointly to Jesus and those who followed him and those who disbelieved in him. It gives their ultimate result on the Day of Resurrection. And with this verse the story of Jesus comes to its end—from the time Mary got the good news to the end of his earthly life.

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَأُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(3:56) ***Then as to those who disbelieve, I will chastise them with severe chastisement in this world and the hereafter, and they shall have no helpers.***

Apparently, it branches out from the phrase, "so I will decide between you"; it gives detail of that preceding general statement, describing the Divine Judgment on the Day of Resurrection—severe chastisement for the Jews who disbelieve, and full reward for the believers.

But the phrase "in this world" shows that the verse branches out from two preceding sentences: "And make those who follow you above those who disbelieve …"; "Then to Me shall be your return …" Thus, the verse says that as a result of that "making" and that "returning," the disbelievers shall be severely punished in this world on the hands of those whom God has made dominant above them, and in the hereafter with the Fire, *and they shall have no helpers.*

It is another proof to show that in the preceding verse, making dominant means domination through power and rule, not through proofs.

The sentence "And they shall have no helpers" proves that they will not be able to avail of any intercession which could protect them from the chastisement. It is a firm decree which cannot change.

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(3:57) ***And as to those who believe and do good deeds, He will pay them fully their rewards; and Allah does not love the unjust.***

It is an attractive promise of good reward for those who followed Jesus. But, as mentioned above, the phrase "those who follow you" could be applied to the whole nation even when only a few of them actually followed him. Application of a name is one thing and actually having that attribute personally is something else. Good result and lovely reward is given only to him who actually has that attribute—not to him who is merely included in nomenclature. God says: *Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve* (2:62).

This then is the reward of those who believed and did good deeds from among those who followed Jesus; God will pay them fully their reward. The other group from those followers shall get no reward. God has pointed to this fact at the end of the verse: *and Allah does not love the unjust.*

It is now clear why this verse—a verse of mercy and paradise—has ended with the phrase "And God does not love the unjust". Otherwise, such verses usually end with Divine Names of mercy and forgiveness, or on praise of those for whom the verse is revealed. For example:

And Allah has promised good to all; and Allah is aware of what you do (57:10).

If you lend to Allah a goodly loan, He will double it for you and forgive you; and Allah is grateful, forbearing (64:17).

… and whoever believes in Allah and does good, He will remove from him his evil and cause him to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein for ever; that is the great achievement (64:9).

Then as to those who believed and did good, their Lord will make them enter into His mercy; that is the manifest achievement (45:30).

We may go on quoting such examples from the Qur'an. However, it is now clear that the phrase *and God does not love the unjust* describes the other group from among those who claim to follow Jesus but are not true believers, nor do they do good deeds.

ذَٰلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٥٨﴾

(3:58) ***This we recite to you of the signs and the wise reminder.***

It indicates the end of the story. The "wise reminder" is the Qur'an; it reminds one of God and is firm and wise in its verses and descriptions; falsehood cannot enter it, nor can non-serious talk pollute it.

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِندَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ ۖ خَلَقَهُ مِن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾

(3:59) ***Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: Be, and he was.***

It is the summary of the necessary points described in detail in preceding verses. Such summing up after detailed description—especially in arguments and discussions—is a beauty of style. The verses were revealed for arguments with the delegation of the Christians of Najrān. It was proper to sum up the basic point of Jesus' creation—after giving the story in detail—to show that the particular circumstances of his birth do not prove anything except that he was a created man like Adam (peace be on them both). Therefore, it is not permissible to say about him more than that which is said about Adam—that is, he was a man whom God created without the agency of a father.

The verse therefore means: The condition of Jesus in the sight of God—as God knows how He had created him—is only that the manner of his creation resembles that of Adam's creation. How was Adam created? God gathered various portions of earth and said to him, "Be," and he became a human being without any father.

This verse actually contains two independent proofs, either is sufficient to refute the idea of Jesus' divinity.

First: Jesus is a creature created by God—as God knows, and He is never confused in His knowledge. He created him a man, albeit without a father. And such a person is a servant of God, not a god.

Second: Jesus' creation is not greater than that of Adam. If Jesus'

unusual creation may in any way justify the belief in his godhead, then Adam's creation will justify the same belief. But no Christian says that Adam was god. Therefore, they should not have such belief about Jesus. After all, both cases are the same.

The verse shows that Jesus' creation, like that of Adam, was physical and of this world, although it happened against the usual manner of conception, because usually a child is conceived through the agency of a father.

Apparently, *fa-yakūn* (lit: and he is) is used here to describe a past event—that is why we have translated it as "And he was".

The phrase, "then said to him, 'Be', and he was," shows instant, not gradual creation, but we know that both Adam and Jesus had undergone a gradual process of creation. The fact is that there is no contradiction in these two aspects—because condition changes with the change of context. All things, whether they come into being gradually or instantly, are created by God, brought into being by His command, that is, by the word, "Be," as He says: *His command, when He intends anything, is only that He says to it, Be , and it is* (36:82). Many of these things, come into existence gradually—when they are seen in the framework of their gradual causes. But when they are seen in relation to God, then there is no graduality in their existence, no gap between the command, "Be," and their "being"; God says: *And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye* (54:50). We shall explain it in detail in a more appropriate place, God willing.

The main idea behind the statement, "then said to him, 'Be', and he was," is as follows: God is not dependent on causes when He creates a thing. Things which He intends to create have equal relation with Him. If they were related to Him through causes, their conditions could have differed one with another, some would have looked possible, others impossible; one would have been easy, the other difficult; one nearer, another far away—all depending on the conditions of the relevant causes. But God does not need any cause to bring about an effect; whatever He intends, He says to it, "Be," and it comes into being.

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(3:60) ***The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the doubters.***

It emphasizes the meaning of the preceding verse which was itself emphasized by the use of the particle "surely". It serves the same purpose

as the verse, "This We recite to you of the signs and the wise reminder," revealed at the end of the detailed story. It was to set the Prophet's mind at rest that he was on truth, and to strengthen him in the argument.

The sentence, "The truth is from your Lord," is one of the finest expressions of the Qur'an. It uses the preposition, "from," which shows beginning point. The truth starts from your Lord. If you were to change it to some other particle, example, "with," saying, the truth is with your Lord, it would give a hint of polytheism; and would actually show God as helpless, in need of that truth.

The true maxims and the propositions showing real and unalterable facts are self-evident and impossible to change; for example, four is an even number; one is half of two; and so on. Man finds out these self-evident truths from the really existing things; and existence—all of it—is from God. Therefore, the truth—all of it—is from Him. That is why God is not questioned concerning what He does and men are questioned. An action of a creature, if it is correct and right, accompanies the truth, but the action of God is existence itself, and therefore, truth itself.

Examining Narrations

(1) The Imam said[1] about the words of God: *O Mary! surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds:* "(God) chose her twice: As for the first, He chose her, that is, selected her; and as for the second, she conceived without a husband; in this way, He made her excel over the women of the worlds." (*al-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

(2) Abū Jaʿfar said about this verse: "It means that He selected you for the progeny of the prophets, and purified you from unchastity, and chose you for the birth of Jesus without a husband." (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*)

Author's comment: The saying of the Imam, "He selected you for the progeny of the prophets," means that He selected you to be a good offspring worthy of being related to the prophets The phrase, "And purified you from unchastity," means that He gave you protection from unchastity;

1 This is the Commentary of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī himself and not the saying of the Imam. (See al-Qummī, *al-Tafsīr*, al-Najaf al-Ashraf, ed., vol. 1, p. 102).The two traditions are not in conflict with each other, as may be seen manifestly. And we have explained that the verse implies this meaning. (Ed.)

this is the best explanation of the Qur'anic words, because she had given birth to Jesus without a husband. Thus, the tradition describes some concomitants of her selection and purification.

(3) It has been narrated by Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī (and he said that it is correct), Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Ḥabbān, and al-Ḥākim from Anas, that he said: "Verily the Messenger of God said: "Sufficient are in excellence from among the women of the worlds, Maryam bint ʿImrān, Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad and Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh!" (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)
al-Suyūṭī has said that Ibn Abī Shaybah has narrated it from al-Ḥasan without connecting the chain of narrators with the Holy Prophet.

(4) al-Ḥākim has narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās (and has said that it is correct), that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'The most excellent of the women of the worlds are Khadījah, and Fāṭimah, and Mary, and Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh.' " (*ibid*.)

(5) Ibn Marduwayh narrates from al-Ḥasan that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'Verily, God chose four (women) over the women of the worlds: Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, and Maryam bint ʿImrān and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad.' " (*ibid*)

(6) Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Fāṭimah that she said: "The Messenger of God said to me: 'You are the chief of the women of the people of the Garden, (and) not Mary, The Virgin.' " (*ibid*.)

(7) Ibn ʿAsākir has narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'The chief of the women of the people of the Garden are Maryam bint ʿImrān, then Fāṭimah, then Khadījah, then Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh.' " (*ibid*.)

(8) Ibn ʿAsākir has narrated through the chain of Muqātil from aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ʿAbbās from the Prophet that he said: "Four women are the chiefs of the worlds: Maryam bint ʿImrān, and Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad; and the most excellent of them in the world is Fāṭimah." (*ibid*.)

(9) Ibn Abī Shaybah narrates from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'Fāṭimah is the chief of the women of the worlds after Maryam bint ʿImrān, and Āsiyah wife

of the Pharaoh, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid.' " (*ibid.*)

(10) al-Ṣadūq narrates through his chains from 'Ikrimah from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said: "The Messenger of God drew four lines, then said: 'The best of the women of the Garden are Maryam bint ʿImrān, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimāh bint Muḥammad, and Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, wife of the Pharaoh.' " (*al-Khiṣāl*)

(11) Also, he (al-Ṣadūq) narrates through his chains from Abu al-Ḥasan al-Awwal that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'Verily God, the Mighty, the Great, has selected four from among the women: Maryam, Āsiyah, Khadījah, and Fāṭimah …' " (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: There are numerous traditions of nearly the same meaning, narrated by both sects. The fact that these four are the chiefs of the women does not preclude the difference in excellence as amongst themselves, as may be seen in the sixth tradition quoted from *al-Durr al-manthūr,* as well as other traditions. And a similar discourse was written under the verse: *Surely Allah chose Adam and Noah …* (3:33).

A point to ponder: The verse talks about selection and choosing, while the above traditions describe their supremacy.

There is a difference between selection and supremacy; the latter being a degree of the former's perfection.

(12) al-Bāqir said explaining the words of God: … *when they cast their pens* (to decide) *which of them should have Mary in his charge:* "They were drawing the lot about her, when she was orphaned of her father." (al-ʿAyyāshī)

The Imam said about the verse, *And when the angels said: O Mary! surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds,* "(God) chose her twice: As for the first, He chose her, that is, selected her, and as for the second, she conceived without a husband; in this way He made her excel over the women of the worlds.

"… Then God said to His Prophet: 'This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you, (O Muḥammad!) and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mary in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another.' When she was born the family of ʿImrān contended one with another about her; everyone said: 'We shall have her in our charge.' So they went out

and cast lot among themselves with the arrows, and the arrow of Zachariah came out (in the draw) …" (*al-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

Author's comment: The Commentary written above supports this and the preceding tradition. There are numerous traditions giving the details regarding the good news given to Mary, birth of Jesus, his mission and his miracles. But the general outline of his story, given in these verses is enough for the purpose of exegesis. That is why we have not written them here except the important ones.

(13) al-Bāqir said about the words of God, *and I inform you of what you eat …:* "Jesus used to say to the Children of Israel: 'I am the messenger of God to you, and I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission, and I heal the blind and the leper.' (*al-Akmah* means blind.) They said: 'We do not think that what you do is anything but sorcery. Show us therefore a sign by which we may know that you are truthful.' He said: 'Do you think that you would know I was truthful if I informed you of what you eat and what you store in your houses, that is, what you had eaten before you came out of your houses and what you had stored at night?' They said: 'Yes.' So he used to tell them: 'You ate this and this.' Some of them confirmed his words and became believers, and other rejected it. And there was for them a sign in it, if they were believers." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: The style of the verse when describing the latter two signs differs from that used for the former ones, as we had pointed out in the Commentary. And this difference supports the theme of this tradition.

(14) al-Ṣādiq said explaining the verse, *And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you …*: "There was (a distance of) four hundred years between David and Jesus; and it was the shariah of Jesus that he was sent with monotheism and sincerity, and with what (God) had enjoined on Noah, Abraham and Moses; and He revealed to him Injīl; and took from him the covenant that was taken from (all other) prophets; and He ordained for him in the Book establishing the prayer with religion, and enjoining good, and forbidding evil, and prohibiting unlawful, and allowing lawful; and revealed to him in Injīl the sermons and the parables, and the panel code which did not have

retaliation; it contained neither (detailed) rules of panel code nor the shares of inheritance; and He revealed to him alleviation of what was (ordained) for Moses in the Torah. And this is (the meaning of) the words God quoting what Jesus said to the Children of Israel: and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you. And Jesus ordered those who were with him, from among those who followed him of the believers, to believe in the shariah of the Torah and the Injīl." (al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: This tradition is narrated in *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, in detail, from al-Ṣādiq, and there it says that there was a distance of four hundred and eighty years between David and Jesus. But neither of these dates conforms with the history of the People of the Book.

(15) al-Riḍā was asked: "Why the disciples were called *al-ḥawāriyyūn*? (companions, disciples; the root word denotes "intense whiteness.") He said: "According to (other) people, they were wnamed *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, because they were washer-men, they cleansed the dirt from clothes by washing; and it is a name derived from *al-ḥawr* (to bleach, to whiten). But according to us, they were given this name because they were pure in their ownselves and cleansed others from filth of sins by sermon and reminder." (*ʿUyūn al-akhbār*)

The same Imam said that they were twelve men, and the most excellent and most learned of them was Luke.[1] (*al-Tawḥīd*)

(16) al-Ṣādiq said, *inter alia*, in a tradition: "God sent Jesus son of Mary; and entrusted to him light, knowledge and wisdom; and (gave him) all knowledge of the previous prophets, and added Injīl to it. And He sent him to Bayt al-Maqdis, to the Children of Israel, (he came) calling them to his Book and his wisdom, and to the belief in God and His messenger. But most of them insisted on exceeding (the limits) and disbelieving. When they did not believe (in him), he prayed to his Lord, and adjured on Him (to punish them). So (God) transformed (some) satans from among them, in order to show them a sign, so that they might take lesson from it.

"But it did not increase in them except (their) transgression and

1 Apparently, this phrase is an interpolation by one of the narrators, because Luke was not among the twelve disciples. (Trans.)

disbelief. Then (Jesus) came to Bayt al-Maqdis, and continued calling them to, and awakening their interest in, that which is with God, for thirty-three years, until the Jews got up in his pursuit. And they claimed that they tortured him and buried him in the earth alive. And some of them claimed that they killed and crucified him. But God was not to give them power over him; but it only appeared to them so; and they were not able to torture and kill him or to kill and crucify him, because if they could do so it would have been a refutation of the words of God; but God caused him to ascend after taking him away completely." (*Kamāl al-dīn*)

Author's comment: The words of the Imam: "God transformed (some) satans from among them," means that He transformed a group of evil persons from among them. "And continued calling them for thirty-three years"; perhaps it refers to his span of life, as it is well-known that he lived on this earth for thirty-three years. Jesus talked to them from his cradle up to his mature age, and he was prophet from his early childhood, as the Qur'an quotes him saying in the verses: *But she pointed to him. They said: How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle? He said: Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet* (19:29–30). "It would have been a refutation of the words of God; but God caused him to ascend after taking him away completely." It is a paraphrase of the Qur'anic words: *Rather Allah took him up to Himself* (4:158); and, *I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me.* As this verse mentions taking him away before causing him to ascend, the tradition infers that the events happened in the same sequence.

(17) al-Bāqir said: "Jesus made a promise to his companions, the night when God took him up to Himself. So they gathered near him in the evening, and they were twelve men; and he made them enter into a house. Then he came to them from a fountain that was in the corner of the house, shaking off water from his hair. Then he said: 'Verily God has revealed to me that He is going to take me up just now to Himself and purify me from the Jews. Now who among you (agrees) that my features be put on him, in order that he is killed and crucified (in my place) and he shall be with me in my rank?' A young man among them said: 'I, O Spirit of God!' He said: 'So you are that.' Then Jesus said to them: 'Why! surely there is one of you who will reject me twelve times before

it is morning.' One of them asked: 'Am I that? O prophet of God!' Jesus said to him: 'Do you feel it in your heart? Then be you that.' Thereafter Jesus told them: 'Why! surely you will divide after me in three groups: two groups, forging lie against God, (shall be) in the Fire; and one group following Shamʿūn,[1] being true to God, (shall be) in the Garden.' Then God caused Jesus to ascend to Him from the corner of the house while they were looking at him."
Then the Imam said: "The Jews came searching for Jesus the same night. And they caught the man about whom Jesus had said: 'Surely there is one of you who will reject me twelve times before it is morning'; and they took the young man who had been given the features of Jesus and he was killed and crucified. And he for whom Jesus had said that he would reject him twelve times before it was morning, did (indeed) reject him." (*al-Tafsīr,* al-Qummī)

Author's comment: The traditions of nearly the same meaning have been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, Qatādah and others. Some people have said that the man who was made to look like Jesus was the same person who had guided the Jews so that they could arrest and kill him. There are some other views regarding those details. But the Qur'an is silent on this subject; and we shall write on it in detail under the verse: … *and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so* … (4:157).

(18) al-Riḍā said: "There never was, in the eyes of the people, any uncertainty concerning the affairs of any prophet or Proof of God except the affair of Jesus alone; because he was taken up from the earth alive, and he was given death between the heaven and the earth, then he was taken up to the heaven. And this is (the meaning of) the words of God, the Mighty, the Great: *And when Allah said: O Jesus! I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you*; and (also) God says quoting the words of Jesus (which he will say) on the Day of Resurrection: *And I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things* (5:117)." (*ʿUyūn al-akhbār*)

(19) al-Ṣādiq said: "Jesus son of Mary was taken up with a woollen outer garment, spun by Mary, and woven by Mary, and sewn by

1 Simon the Peter, in English. (Trans.)

Mary. But when he reached the heaven, he was addressed: 'O Jesus! Lay down your worldly embellishment.' " (al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: We shall explain the meaning of the above quoted two traditions, God willing, at the end of the Chapter 4, "The Women."

(20) It is written in *al-Durr al-manthūr* about the verse: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah …:* ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Qatādah that he said: "We have been told that al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, the two chiefs and bishops of the people of Najrān, met the Prophet of God and asked him about Jesus, and said to him: 'Every human being has a father. Then why is it that Jesus had no father?' Then God revealed this verse about him: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam.*

Author's comment: The traditions of nearly the same meaning have been narrated from al-Suddī, ʿIkrimah and others. al-Qummī also has narrated in his *al-Tafsīr,* that the verse was revealed on the same occasion.

Some other Traditions about *al-Muḥaddath*

(1) Zurārah said: "I asked Abū ʿAbdillāh about the messenger, the prophet and *al-muḥaddath* (the one spoken to). He said: 'The messenger is the one who sees the angel (who) brings the message of his Lord to him, and tells him: "(God) orders you so-and-so." And the messenger is a prophet with (the added rank of) messengership. And the prophet does not see the angel, something comes down to him—the news (comes) to his heart; and he becomes as though he be in a trance, and he sees (the vision) in his dream.' I said: 'Then how does he know that what he saw in his dream was truth?' He said: 'God makes it clear to him, so that he knows that it is truth; and he does not see the angel. And *al-muḥaddath* is the one who hears the voice and does not see (the speaker) in person.' " (*Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*)

Author's comment: It has been narrated from the same Imam in *al-Kāfī* also.

The original word of the Imam at the end of the tradition is *shāhidan* (translated here as "in person"); it literally means "At present"; also it may be a conditional phrase related to the subject; in other words, it may mean, "he does not see manifestly".

(2) Burayd inquired from al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (peace be on both of them), inter alia, in a tradition: "Then what is a messenger, a

prophet and 'the one spoken to'?" He (the Imam) said: "A messenger is one to whom the angel appears and speaks; and a prophet is one who sees in his dream; and possibly the messengership and the prophethood is combined in a single person. The *muḥaddath* is the one who hears the voice of the angel but does not see his person." Burayd said: "I said: 'May God make things right for you! How can he know that what has he seen in his dream is the truth and that it is from the angel?' He (the Imam) said: 'He is directed in the right way until he knows it (with certainty). God has surely set a seal on the (divine) books with your Book, and on the prophets with your prophet.' " (*ibid.*)

(3) Muḥammad b. Muslim said: "I mentioned *al-muḥaddath* in the presence of Abū ʿAbdillāh. He said: 'Verily he hears the voice but does not see his person.' I said: 'May God make things right for you!

How does he know that it is the speech of the angel?' He said: 'He is given tranquillity and dignity so that he knows that it is the angel (speaking).' " (*ibid.*)

(4) Abū Baṣīr narrates from the same Imam that he said: "'Alī was the *muḥaddath*, and Salmān was the *muḥaddath*." Abū Baṣīr says: "I said: 'Then what is the sign of the *muḥaddath*?' He said: 'The angel comes to him and scratches his heart (that is, communicates to him) so-and-so.' " (*ibid.*)

(5) Ḥumrān b. Aʿyan said: "Abū Jaʿfar said to me that ʿAlī was the muḥaddath. (When I told this to) our Companions, (they) said: 'You did nothing when you did not ask him who used to speak to him?' Then it happened that I (again) met Abū Jaʿfar; and I said to him: 'Did not you inform me that ʿAlī was spoken to?' He said: 'Surely.' I said: 'Who used to speak to him?' He said: 'An angel.' I said: 'Then I may say that he was a prophet or a messenger?' He said: 'No. But you should say that his likeness was the likeness of the Companion of Solomon and the Companion of Moses; and his likeness was the likeness of Dhū al-Qarnayn. Why! Have not you heard that ʿAlī was asked about Dhu al-Qarnayn whether he was a prophet?' He said: 'No. But he was a servant who loved God, so (God) loved him; and he was sincere towards God, so (God) gave him good advice (that is, guided him). So this also is like that.' " (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: There are numerous traditions narrated from the Imams of the Ahl al-bayt about the meaning of 'the one spoken to' found in *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, *al-Kāfī*, *Kanz al-fawāʾid*, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* and other books. This topic is found in the Sunnī traditions too.

As for the distinction given by these traditions, between a prophet, a messenger and 'the one spoken to', we have described the difference between a messenger and a prophet. Also it has been explained that through revelation God speaks to His servant, and it creates by itself firm and certain knowledge, and this knowledge does not require any other proof. Among all Divine messages, revelation has the same position as the self-evident truths have in human knowledge—man does not need any proof or logical deduction to know that it is truth.

As for the dream, you must have noted that the traditions explain it in another way; it is not the vision which one sees normally in sleep; rather it denotes something like a trance, in which the external senses of the prophet are suspended, and then he observes what God wants him to see in the same way as we observe the things in our wakening. Then God strengthens his conviction by bestowing on him the certainty that what he has seen is from God and not a Satanic manipulation.

As for being spoken to, it denotes hearing the voice of an angel. But he hears it by his heart, not by the ears, nor is it something like ideas or imaginations occurring in the mind, because idea or imagination is not called 'hearing the voice'—except as a far-fetched allegory. That is why the traditions describe it as hearing the voice and also as communicating to the heart; and yet name it as speech and talk. In short, the *muḥaddath* hears the voice of the angel and listen to it with his 'hearing, power' just as we hear and listen to normal talks and voices heard in this material world; but no other person can share in that talk or hear that voice, and therefore it is called a matter of heart.

As for his firm knowledge that what he heard was an angel's talk and not a Satanic whispering, it happens by the help of God, as is explained in the above-quoted tradition of Muḥammad b. Muslim: "He is given tranquillity and dignity so that he knows that it is the angel (speaking)." The Satanic whispering—surely a falsehood—may come in either of the two ways: It may appear in a form which the believer knows to be false, and then he naturally will know that it cannot be the talk of an angel because angels do not disobey God and do not go against His command. Or, it may appear wearing a mask of truth and fact—hoping to bring in

its wake falsehood and lie. In such case, the Divine Light, which always leads the believer, exposes its reality. God says: *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people …* (6:122).

Apart from that, whispering and evil suggestions always create restlessness in soul and turmoil in heart, contrary to the remembrance of God and His speech which create gravity, and tranquillity. God says: *It is only the Satan that frightens his friends* (3:175); *now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest* (13:28); *Surely those who are pious, when a visitation from the Satan afflicts them they become mindful, then lo! they see* (7:201).

When therefore the heart of the *muḥaddath* is blessed with tranquillity and dignity at the time when he hears the message, it conclusively proves that the message is from God. Conversely, restlessness and anxiety would show that it was a Satanic whispering, which brings precipitation, anxiety, anguish, etc., in its wake.

The traditions say that the *muḥaddath* hears the voice of the angel and does not see him. It looks at the reality of being spoken to, and gives its academic definition. But it does not mean that the *muḥaddath* cannot see the angel. A man becomes *al-muḥaddath* (the one spoken to), as soon as he hears an angel's voice, it is not necessary for him to see the angel. And if the *muḥaddath* sees the angel, it is not because he is spoken to; it is an added excellence. Many verses clearly show that some of those spoken to had seen the angels when they spoke to them.

For example: Mary: *then We sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man. She said: Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allah, if you are pious. He said: I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy* (19:17–19).

Wife of Abraham: *And certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with good news. They said: Peace. Peace, said he And his wife was standing (by), so she laughed; then We gave her the good news of Isaac and after Isaac of (a son's son) Jacob. She said: O woe to me! shall I bear a son (now) when I am an (extremely) old (woman) and this my husband an (extremely) old (man)? Most surely this is an amazing thing. They said: Do you wonder at the decree of Allah? The mercy of Allah and His blessings be on you, O people of the house surely He is Praised, Glorious* (11:69–73).

However, the above traditions may have got another explanation: The statement that the *muḥaddath* does not see the angel, may mean that he does not see the reality of the angels, although he might see them in the

form which they assume when appearing before him. After all, the above-quoted verses only show that Mary and the wife of Abraham had seen the angels in human form—the assumed form.

Someone has suggested a third interpretation: The statement means that the angel does not bring to him any revelation of the shariah; he does not appear before him with a legislative order; and this distinction is meant to protect the dignity of the messengers and the prophets.

But it is a far-fetched interpretation.

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Verses 61–63

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا
وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ
لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٦١﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ ۚ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا
اللَّهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ
بِالْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(3:62–63) ***But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars. Most surely this is the true story, and there is no god but Allah; and most surely Allah is the Mighty, the Wise. But if they turn back then surely Allah knows the mischief makers.***

Fa (translated here as "But") shows that the offer of *al-mubāhalah* (earnest imprecation) branches out from the Divine teaching explained above so clearly and convincingly about Jesus son of Mary, and ended so emphatically with the words, *The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the doubters* (3:60). The pronoun "this" in the clause "in this" refers either to Jesus or to the "truth" mentioned in the preceding verse.

The preceding verses were Divine Revelation in which there could be no doubt at all. Apart from that, they contained a clear logical proof, that is, the verse: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam …* (3:59). Thus, the knowledge emanating from these verses is two-fold: one, because it is a Divine Speech: two, because of its rational proof. That is why this knowledge was not reserved for the Prophet only; others too could understand it. Even if someone did not believe it to be a Divine Revelation, he could not entertain any doubt about the truth of the subject discussed, because it contained rational argument which an unbiased mind was bound to accept. Perhaps that is why God said: "After what has come to you of knowledge"; and did not say, "after what We have

explained to them."

Another point: By reminding the Prophet of the Divine Knowledge, God wanted to assure him that he would overwhelm his adversaries by God's permission and that God would surely be on his side supporting him in that dispute.

… then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves: The first person plural pronoun in "let us call" has a different import from the plural pronouns in "our sons" "our women" and "our selves." The former refers to the both parties of the argument, that is, the advocates of Islam and those of Christianity; while the latter refer to the side of Islam only. Accordingly, the meaning would be as follows: Let us both call the sons, the women and the 'selves'; we should call our sons, our women and our 'selves', and you should call your sons, your women and your 'selves'. The verse thus has shortened a long sentence in a meaningful and pleasant way.

al-Mubāhalah and *al-mulāʿanah* both have the same meaning: to curse each other. The actual parties of the argument were the Messenger of God on one side, and the Christians men on the other. But in the challenge for the imprecation, the call was extended to the sons and women, as it would show more convincingly that the claimant is perfectly sure of the truth of his claim, that he is absolutely right. God has put in man the love of his children and family, to such an extent that he puts himself in jeopardy to save them, plunges into perilous situations to keep them safe. And precisely for this reason, sons have been mentioned before women, because man loves his sons more than his women.

An exegete has said: "The verse means, let us call your sons, your women and your selves; and let you call our sons, our women and our selves." But the explanation given by us above shows how absurd this meaning is. This meaning does not leave any justification for including the sons and the women in the earnest imprecation.

The detailed description of the invitees is a further proof that the caller (that is, the Prophet) has absolute confidence in the truth of his claim. The import of the call is as follows: Let my whole group and your whole group enter into earnest imprecation, so that both groups pray earnestly to God and bring about the curse of God on the liars. In this way, the Divine curse and chastisement shall cover the sons, women and selves of the liars, and the enemies of truth shall be annihilated completely, they shall be rooted out without leaving any trace.

Consequently, the truth of this speech does not depend on numerousness of the sons, the women or the 'selves'. The main brunt of the challenge is that one party—that which is on wrong—should perish together with all its near and dear ones—male and female, old and young. The exegetes unanimously say—and traditions and history support them—that when the Messenger of God came out for the imprecation, the only persons whom he brought with him were: ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (peace be on them all!). Therefore, the only participants, on the side of Islam, were two 'selves,' two sons and one woman—and yet the Prophet did fully comply with the Divine Command.

Moreover, the meaning of a word in a verse is one thing, and it is quite another matter as for whom, or on how many people, could that word be applied in practice. We find numerous examples in the Qur'an where an order, a promise or a threat has been mentioned using plural words, but the circumstances of its revelation show that it was revealed for one person only. For example: *(As for) those of you who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers, they are not their mothers* (58:2); *And (as for) those who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers then would recall what they said …* (58:3); *Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said: Surely Allah is poor and we are rich* (3:181); *And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever can be spared* (2:219). There are a lot of verses which were revealed with plural words, although the events for which they were revealed concerned one person only.

… then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars:[1] The words, "And bring about the curse of God," are a sort of explanation for the preceding verb, "then let us pray earnestly." The verse said, "And bring about the curse of God"; it did not say, and ask from God to curse. It was an indication that the prayer would surely be granted because at that juncture it was the only way to distinguish the truth from the falsehood.

The word, "the liars," does not refer to all the liars found anywhere in the world, nor does it mean the genes of the liars. It refers to a particular group—that party of the argument (between the Prophet and the Christians) which was wrong in its claim. The Prophet was saying that

1 *Al-Ibtihāl* is derived from *al-bahlah* also pronounced *al-buhlah* (curse). This is its basic meaning; then it was commonly used for earnest prayer. (Auth.)

God is One, there is no god besides Him, and that Jesus was His servant and messenger; while the Christians said that Jesus was God, and son of God, and that God had three persons.

This observation leads us to another reality. All those who came out for the proposed imprecation were equal partners in their respective claim. Had the claim and the resulting imprecation been between the Prophet only and the Christians, one party (that is, the Prophet) would demand singular words, and the other, plural. In such cases, it is necessary to use an expression which would cover singular and plural both. For example, the sentence under discussion could have been written like this: and bring about the curse of God on whosoever is lying. But it says: "… on the liars." It proves that indeed there were liars (in plural) in one party of the argument, either on the side of the Prophet or on the Christians' side. Consequently, all those who came out for the imprecation would be partners in the claim—because lie presupposes a claim. Therefore, those who were present on the side of the Prophet for the imprecation—that is, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn—were partners in the claim of the Messenger of God and his Mission. It is one of the most excellent virtues which were given exclusively to these family-members of the Prophet (peace be on them all!). Another exclusive excellence: God gave them the names of 'selves', women and sons of the Prophet to the exclusion of all the men, women and children of the *ummah.*

Question: You have mentioned above that the Qur'an uses, more often than not, plural words for singular; and even this verse says "our women" while it was only one lady, that is, Fāṭimah, who participated in the imprecation. Then why should the plural, "the liars," be not explained in the same way?

Reply: There is a vast difference between the two. There is a situation which may happen again and again, and there is another which is not expected to repeat itself. In the former situation, it is perfectly all right to use a plural in place of a singular, so that the rule or comment would cover even those who would be doing the same thing in future. But in the latter situation it is not allowed to use plural in place of singular, because the event is not to repeat itself and no one else is expected to be included in that order or comment, etc. Look for example at the following verses:

And when you said to him to whom Allah had shown favor and to whom you had shown favor: Keep your wife to yourself and fear Allah (33:37).

The tongue of him whom they are inclined to blame (for it) is barbarous

and this is clear Arabic tongue (16:103).

O Prophet! surely We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries, … and a believing woman if she gave herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desired to marry her—specially for you, not for the (rest of) believers; (33:50).

And the order for calling to the imprecation could not be extended beyond that particular situation, that is, the imprecation between the Prophet and the Christians. Therefore, when God uses a plural, there should be more than two in both parties which were called; otherwise, the use of the plural "the liars" would be out of place.

Question: All the Christians who had come in the delegation of the Najrān were a party to a claim—the claim that Jesus was God, and the son of God, and one of the three persons of God. There was no discord among them in this matter, nor was there any difference in this claim between their men and women. Likewise, the claim on the side of the Prophet—that God is One, there is no god but He; and Jesus son of Mary was His servant and His messenger—was upheld by all the believers; it was not confined to any one of them—not even the Prophet. Therefore, it is out of place to say that those who were brought by the Prophet for the imprecation had any superiority or excellence over the rest of the believers. In fact, the Prophet had brought them just as examples of the sons, women and selves mentioned in the verse.

Moreover, claim and mission are two different things. Those who participated in the imprecation were party to the claim. How is it that you have made them partners in the Mission too?

Reply: Had the Prophet brought them just as samples, it was necessary for him to bring at least two other men, three women and three sons—to comply with the demand of the plurals. Yet, he did not do so. It proves that only those who came with him were worthy of being called his sons, his women and his selves—to the exclusion of all the others. Only on accepting this fact, we can say that he obeyed the Divine Order given in this verse. In other words, he could not find any one worthy of being included in these categories, except the one man, one woman and two sons whom he brought with him. There was no one else whom he could include in compliance with the plural words of the verse. In these circumstance, he fully complied with the order, although he could not bring three persons in any category.

Moreover, if you ponder on the events, you will see that the only aim

of the Christians of Najrān in coming to Medina was to confront the Messenger of God and to argue with him about Jesus son of Mary. It was the Messenger of God who was claiming that Jesus was a servant of God and His messenger. It was he who called others to believe in this claim, saying that it was based on Divine Revelation—the revelation which, he said, was sent to him. As for the rest of the believers, the Christians had nothing to do with them; nor did they argue with them. That is why God has used singular verbs and pronouns in the beginning of this verse, when referring to the Prophet: "But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say..." The same is the case of the verse: *But if they dispute with you, say: I have submitted myself (entirely) to Allah and (so has) every one who follows me* (3:20).

The above explanation shows that the Messenger of God (blessings of God be on him and his progeny!) had not brought those personalities as samples or examples of other believers—because the believers, per se, had no part in that disputation or imprecation; and there was no reason why they should be offered as targets for the curse and punishment which were to come to one of the two parties (the Christians and their adversary, that is, the Prophet). The Prophet himself was a party of that argument and it was his obligation to offer himself as the target of the calamity which could come to him in case his claim was (God forbid!) wrong. Now, there was no reason why he should bring ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn with him, if his claim were not dependent on them also, as it was on his own self. He had come with them for imprecation because they were the only sons, woman and self on whom his claim depended. Surely he had not brought them as samples or examples. It is now crystal clear that these personalities were his partners in his claim; the claim depended on them as it did on him.

Furthermore, the Christians had come to argue with the Prophet not just because he believed that Jesus son of Mary was the servant and messenger of God. They had taken upon themselves to come up to Medina because, in addition to claiming those things about Jesus, he had called and invited them to believe likewise. This call, this mission, was the main reason why they had come in delegation for argument. Consequently, when the Prophet came to the appointed place of imprecation, bringing with him the four personalities, it was because of that claim and that call together. Thus these personalities were his partners in his mission, as they had been his partners in his claim.

Question: We accept that the Prophet came with them because they were a part of him; and this attribute was not found in others, it was their exclusive excellence. But it appears—and normal practice confirms it that when a man brings his near and dear ones, his women and children, in dangerous and frightening places, it shows that he is fully confident of his and their safety and comfort. His bringing them for imprecation proves only that he was absolutely sure of his truth—it does not show anything else. It is quite irrelevant to say that his action proves that they were his partners in the mission.

Reply: It is true that the beginning of the verse does not show more than that which has been mentioned above. But the end of the verse, that is, "on the liars," shows that there were surely liars (in plural) in one of the two sides of the argument and imprecation. Such expression could only be used if there were several people in each group, all making some claim—be it true or false. Therefore, those who were brought there by the Prophet were indeed his partners, both in the claim and in the mission, as was explained above. It is thus proved that those who were present there with the Prophet—all of them—were parties to the claim and the mission, together with the Prophet, and were his partners in it.

Question: It follows, from what you have said, that they were his partners in the prophethood.

Reply: Not at all. We have explained earlier where we have discussed "Prophethood"[1] that the Call and Propagation are not one and the same with the prophethood, although they are among its conditions and concomitants, and are parts of the divinely-bestowed responsibilities which a prophet takes upon himself. Likewise, we have made it clear in the discourse about the *Imamah*[2] that they are not identical with *Imamah* either, although they are in a way among its concomitants.

Most surely this is the true story, and there is no god but Allah: The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the earlier mentioned stories of Jesus. There is a fine literary transposition in the sentence. What it says is as follows: Most surely the stories We have told you concerning Jesus are the truth—not that which is told by the Christians.

There is multiple emphasis in this sentence: *Innā* (surely), and *la* (surely) followed by an additional pronoun *huwa* (this) are all combined

1 Vide vol. 3 (Engl. transl.), under the verse 2:213. (Auth.)

2 Vide vol. 2 (Engl. transl.), under the verse 2:124. (Auth.)

together to put utmost emphasis on this statement. It was done to cheer the Prophet and to encourage him and strengthen his heart for the coming imprecation, by augmenting his certainty and insight, and fortifying his confidence in the revelation which God had sent to him. It is further strengthened by additional emphasis contained in the next sentence which describes an accompanying reality: "And there is no god but God". This fact once again shows that the preceding stories are truth.

… and most surely Allah is the Mighty, the Wise: The conjunctive "And" joins it to the first sentence of the verse. The same modes of emphasis have again been used here. It aims at further comforting the Prophet and strengthening his heart. It says that God is Mighty: He has power to help the side of the truth. And He is Wise: He cannot neglect or forget this aid, because ignorance or oblivion cannot reach Him. He is not like those false deities whom the enemies of the truth have taken for themselves besides Him.

This explanation shows why these two Divine Names were chosen for concluding this verse. The sentence contains an exclusiveness: Only God is the Mighty and the Wise.

But if they turn back then surely Allah knows the mischief makers: What should be the actual aim of any argument or imprecation? The manifestation of the truth. If so, then it is unthinkable for a seeker of truth to turn back from it. If the Christians really wanted the truth to be manifested—and they knew that God was the Guardian of truth and that He would never allow it to be destroyed or invalidated—they would not turn back from the proposed imprecation. And if they did, it would show that their aim by all this argumentation and disputation was not the manifestation of truth; they only wanted apparent victory, preservation of the status they had and beliefs they followed, and continuation of the customs and traditions with which they were familiar. Their only goal was that which their desire, lust and greed had made to seem fair to them—and it was not the good life which conforms with truth and happiness; it was but a semblance of life. In other words, they did not want reform and improvement; they wanted to make mischief in the world by corrupting the good life. Their turning back would mean that they were mischief-makers.

The sentence uses a metaphorical device of putting the cause in place of the effect; it mentions their mischief-making instead of saying that they do not want the truth to be manifested.

The second part of the sentence refers to the Divine Attribute of knowledge, and it has been emphasized with addition of *inna* (surely), as it says: "then surely God knows." It was to show that mischief-making and thwarting the manifestation of truth was ingrained in their psyche, and God knows that as a result of that deep rooted trait they will surely turn back from the imprecation. And so they did and by doing so proved the truth of the Divine Words.

Examining Narrations

(1) al-Ṣādiq said: "When the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of God as a delegation—and their leaders were al-Ahtam, al-ʿĀqib, and al-Sayyid—and (the time of) their prayer came, they began to ring hand-bells and prayed. The Companions of the Messenger of God said: 'O Messenger of God! This in your Mosque?' He said: 'Let them be!' When they finished (their prayer) they came near the Messenger of God and said: 'To what do you call (us)?' He said: 'To bearing the witness that there is no god except God, and that I am the Messenger of God, and that Jesus was a servant created (by God), he used to eat, drink and relieve himself.' They said: 'Then who was his father?' Thereupon came the revelation to the Messenger of God saying: 'Say to them, "What do you say about Adam? Was he a servant created (by God) who used to eat, drink, relieve himself and cohabit?" ' The Prophet put this question to them and they replied: 'Yes.' He said: 'Then who was his father?' and they became speechless. Then God sent down (the verse): *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust …*; and the verse: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge … and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars.*
"Then the Messenger of God said: '(If you do not agree with what I say) then enter into earnest imprecation with me; thus if I am truthful the curse will be sent down on you and if I am a liar it will be sent down on me.' They said: 'You have done justice.'
"So they made an appointment for the imprecation. When they returned to the place they were staying, their leaders al-Sayyid, al-ʿĀqib and al-Ahtam, said: 'If he comes for the imprecation against us with his nation (that is, people unrelated to him), we shall enter into imprecation against him, because then he is not a

prophet. But if he enters into imprecation against us with only the people of his House, we shall not enter into imprecation against him, because he will not put the People of his House forward unless he is truthful.'

"When the morning came, they came to the Messenger of God—and there were with him the Leader of the Faithful (ʿAlī), Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. The Christians said: 'Who are these?' They were told: 'This is his cousin, *al-waṣiy* (executor of will) and son-in-law, and this is his daughter Fāṭimah, and these are his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.' So they were frightened and said to the Messenger of God: 'We shall pay you whatever you are pleased with, but excuse us from the imprecation.' Thereupon the Messenger of God made agreement with them on (the condition of) *al-jizyah* (tax); and they went away." (*al-Tafsīr,* al-Qummī)

(2) al-Rayyān b. al-Ṣalt narrates a talk of al-Riḍā with al-Maʾmūn and the scholars about the difference between the Prophet's progeny and the rest of the *ummah* and the former's superiority over the latter, in which he, *inter alia,* says: "The scholars said: 'Has God explained (this) selection in His Book?' al-Riḍā said: 'He has explained the selection manifestly in twelve places — apart from the hidden (references).' Then he described those places of the Qur'an, during which he said: As for the third (verse, it was) when God distinguished His purified creatures and ordered His Prophet to earnestly pray with them for His curse on the liars, in the verse of imprecation. So God, the Mighty, the Great, said: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves. '* The scholars said: 'our selves means the Prophet himself.' Abu al-Ḥasan (al-Riḍā) said: 'You are mistaken. He only meant ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. And one of the proofs to show it is the saying of the Prophet (himself): "Banū Walīʿah should give up (their mischief); otherwise, I will surely send to them a man like my own self"—referring to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. And He meant al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn with "sons," and meant Fāṭimah with "women". So this is an exclusive virtue in which no one can precede them, and an excellence in which no man can reach them, and an honor in which no creature can overtake them, because He made ʿAlī's person like his (Prophet's)

own self (person)...' " (*ʿUyūn al-akhbār*)

(3) al-Ṣadūq narrates through his chain from al-Imam Mūsa b. Jaʿfar (peace be on both of them!), that he had a talk with (Aaron) al-Rashīd, during which al-Rashīd said to him: "How is it that you say, 'We are the offspring of the Prophet', while the Prophet did not leave any offspring? And progeny is through male, not through female; and you are the children of the daughter and her child is not (her father's) progeny." The Imam said: "I said to him: 'I ask you by the right of kinship and that of the grave (that is, of the Prophet) and of him who is therein, that you should excuse me from (replying to) this question.' He said: 'You shall tell me of your proof for it, O son of ʿAlī, and you, O Mūsa! are their leader and their present Imam—thus I have been informed—and I am not going to excuse you from any question I put to you until you bring me a proof from the Book of God; because you claim, O children of ʿAlī! that nothing of it (the Book) comes out from you—not even an *alīf* or a *wāw* but you know its interpretation; and you advance the word of God, the Mighty, the Great, as your proof; *We have not neglected anything in the Book* (6:38), and you are not in need of the opinion of scholars and their analogy.'

"Then I said: 'Do you permit me to reply?' He said: 'Let me have.' I said (reciting the Qur'anic verse): 'I seek refuge of God from the cursed Satan. In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. … and of his (Abraham's) offspring, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron; and thus do We reward those who do good; and Zachariah and John and Jesus and Ilyās; every one was of the good ones (6:84–5). Who was the father of Jesus? O Leader of the Faithful!' He said: 'He had no father.' Then I said: 'Yet He (God) has joined him with the progenies of the Prophets through Mary; and in the same way God, the High, has joined us with the progenies of the Prophet through our mother, Fāṭimah.' (Then I said): 'Should I tell you more? O Leader of the Faithful!' he said: 'Let me have.' I said: '(It is) the word of God, the Mighty, the Great: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars.* And nobody has ever

claimed that the Prophet—on the occasion of the imprecation with the Christians—made anyone enter under the drape except ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. So (this) was the interpretation of His Word: "our sons" meant al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and "our women," Fāṭimah; and "our selves," ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.' " (*ibid.*)

al-Maʾmūn had asked al-Riḍā several questions, one of which was as follows:

al-Maʾmūn said: "What is the proof for the caliphate of your grandfather, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib?"

(The Imam) said: "The verse of *our selves.*"

He (al-Maʾmūn) said: "If there were not *our women.*" He (the Imam) said: "If there were not *our sons.*"

Author's comment: The Imam argued on the strength of the word, *our selves.* He meant that God had made ʿAlī like the person of the Prophet. (And who could have more right to succeed the Prophet than his own person?). al-Maʾmūn said: "If there were not *our women.*" He wanted to say that the reference to "women" indicates that the word "our selves" means "our men," and as such it would not show any excellence. The Imam replied: "If there were not *our sons.*" That is, if "our selves" referred to the men, then why should the sons be mentioned separately? They would have been included in "our men".

(4) Ḥarīz narrates from Abū ʿAbdillāh that he said: "The Leader of the Faithful (ʿAlī) was asked about his excellent virtues. He mentioned some of them. Then they said to him: 'Tell us (some) more.' So he said: 'Verily two Bishops of the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of God, and talked (with him) on the subject of Jesus. Thereupon God revealed the verse: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam.* Then the Messenger of God entered (the house), and held the hands of ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭimah; then he came out, and raised his palms to the heaven and separated his fingers one from another; and called them (the Christians) to the imprecation.' " (Abū ʿAbdillāh,) then said: "And Abū Jaʿfar has said: And that is the way of imprecation; one intertwines his hand in one's (adversary's) hand raising them to the heaven.' " Thereupon when the two Bishops saw him, one of them said to his companion: "By God! If he is a prophet, we shall surely perish; and if he is not a prophet his (own) people

would save us (from the trouble of confronting him)." So they gave up (the imprecation) and went back.' " (al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: This or nearly the same meaning has been narrated in other traditions through the Shīʿī chains. All of them unanimously say that those who were brought by the Prophet for the imprecation were ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn only.

(5) al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī has narrated it in his *al-Amālī*, through his chains from ʿĀmir b. Saʿd from his father; and also through his chains from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr from al-Ṣādiq ; and also through his chains from Sālim b. Abi al-Jaʿd, raising it to Abū Dharr; and also through his chains from Rabīʿah b. Nājid from ʿAlī.

(6) al-Mufīd has narrated it in his *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ,* through his chains from Muḥammad b. al-Zibriqān from Mūsa b. Jaʿfar; and also from Muḥammad b. al-Munkadir from his father from his grandfather.

(7) al-ʿAyyāshī has narrated it in his *al-Tafsīr* from Muḥammad b. Saʿīd al-Urdunnī from Moses b. Muḥammad b. al-Riḍā from his brother; and also from Abū Jaʿfar al-Aḥwal from al-Sādiq; and also from al-Mundhir from ʿAlī; and also through his chains from ʿĀmir b. Saʿd.

(8) al-Furāt has narrated it in his *al-Tafsīr* several traditions to this effect, which separately reach to Abū Jaʿfar, Abū Rāfiʿ, al-Shaʿbī, ʿAlī, and Shahr b. Ḥawshab and several other traditions to the same effect have been narrated in *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*, *Iʿlām al-warā, al-Kharāʾij* and other books.

(9) It has been narrated in *al-Tafsīr* of al-Thaʿlabī[1] from Mujāhid and al-Kalbī: "When the Prophet called the Christians for the imprecation, they said: 'Let us return and think over it.' When they were alone, they asked al-ʿĀqib—and he was a man of good judgment among them: 'O ʿAbd al-Masīḥ! What is your opinion?' He said: 'By God! You are well-aware, O ye Christians! that Muḥammad is a prophet, sent by God, and that he has brought to you the decisive word about your Companion (Jesus). By God! whenever a nation has entered into imprecation with a prophet, their elders have perished and their youngsters have died.

And if you do it, we shall surely perish; but, if you turn down,

1 The author now gives references from the Sunnī books. (Trans.)

for the love of your religion and (want) to remain on what you have at present, then make peace with the man and go back to your towns.'

"So they came to the Messenger of God; and he had come out in the morning carrying al-Ḥusayn in his lap, holding the hand of al-Ḥasan, with Fāṭimah walking behind him and ʿAlī was behind her; and he was saying: 'When I pray, you say "Amen." ' Then the Bishop of Najrān said: 'O ye Christians! Surely I see the faces that if they ask God to remove a mountain from its place, He would surely remove it. Therefore, do not do imprecation, otherwise you will perish, and there will not remain any Christian on the face of the earth, up to the Day of Resurrection.'

"Then they said: 'O Abu al-Qāsim! We have decided that we should not enter into imprecation against you; and that we leave you on your religion and we remain on our religion.' He said: 'Well, if you refuse imprecation, then accept Islam—you will have (the rights) which (other) Muslims have, and on you shall be (the duties) which are on them.' But they refused. So (the Prophet) said: 'Then I shall fight you.' They said: 'We do not have strength to fight against the Arabs. But we shall make peace with you that you will not fight against us or frighten us; nor will you turn us away from our religion, on the condition that we shall pay to you every year two thousand robes—one thousand in Ṣafar and one thousand in Rajab—and thirty coats of mail, (of) common (quality), made of iron.' So the Prophet made agreement with them on these conditions. And he said: By Him in Whose hand is my soul ! Surely destruction had almost descended on the people of Najrān. And if they had entered into imprecation they would have been transformed into monkeys and pigs, and there would have erupted in the valley a conflagration of fire engulfing them all; and surely God would have annihilated Najrān and its inhabitants—even the birds on tree tops; and the year would not have ended for all the Christians but they would have perished."

Author's comment: The event, nearly in similar words, has also been narrated in *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* from Ibn Isḥāq. Also al-Mālikī has narrated it in his *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimmah* from many exegetes; and al-Ḥammūyī has narrated nearly similar tradition from Ibn Jurayḥ.

The agreement contains the phrase, "one thousand in Ṣafar;" it means

al-Muḥarram of Islamic calender, which was the first month of the year in Arabia. In pre-Islamic days it was called "Ṣafar"—the first two months were called *Ṣafar al-Awwal* and *Ṣafar al-Thānī.* Arabs in the days of ignorance used to postpone *Ṣafar al-Awwal.* Then Islam confirmed the sacredness of the *Ṣafar al-Awwal;* so it was called, "the sacred (al-Muḥarram), month of God;" then it became known as al-Muḥarram.

(10) ʿĀmir son of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās narrates from his father that he said: "Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān ordered Saʿd telling him, 'What prevents you from abusing Abū Turāb (ʿAlī)?' He said, 'As for this matter, as long as I remember three things which the Messenger of God has said (about ʿAlī) I will never abuse him; if even one of them were for me, it would have been dearer to me than red livestocks.' I heard the Messenger of God saying, when he left him (ʿAlī) as his Deputy (when going) for one of his battles. ʿAlī said to him, 'O Messenger of God! Are you leaving me behind with women and children?' Thereupon, the Messenger of God said to him: Are you not pleased that you should have the same position with me that Aaron had with Moses—except that there is no prophet after me?' And I heard him saying on the day of Khaybar: 'Most surely tomorrow I will give the standard (of army) to a man who loves God and His Messenger, and whom God and His Messenger do love.' (Saʿd) said: 'So we held our heads high (hoping to catch the eye of the Prophet). But he said: 'Call ʿAlī to me.' So he was brought (before him), sore-eyed; and (the Prophet) put (his) saliva in his eyes (and he was cured); and gave the standard to him. And God conquered (Khaybar) on his hand. And when this verse was revealed: … *then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly …* , the Messenger of God called ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and said: 'O God! These are the People of my House.' " (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim)

Author's comment: This tradition has been narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Abu al-Muʾayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad in his *Kitāb Faḍāʾil ʿAlī*, Abū Nuʿaym in his *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* (from the same narrator as above), and al-Ḥammūyī in his *Farāʾid al-simṭayn.*

(11) Abū Nuʿaym narrates through his chains from ʿĀmir b. Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ from his father that he said: "When this verse was revealed, the Messenger of God called ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and

al-Ḥusayn and said: 'O God! These are the People of my House." (*Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*)

He also narrates in the same book through his chains from al-Shaʿbī from Jābir that he said: "al-ʿĀqib and al-Ṭayyib came to the Messenger of God, and he invited them to Islam. They said: 'We are (already) Muslims, O Muḥammad! He said: 'You tell a lie. If you wish, I would tell you what prevents you from (accepting) Islam.' They said: 'Then let us have.' He said: 'The love of the cross, drinking liquor, and eating the flesh of pig.' Jābir further said: "Then the Prophet invited them to imprecation, and they promised him to come to him in the morning. When the morning came, the Messenger of God held the hands of ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭimah. Then he sent (someone) to them. But they refused to accept his call (for imprecation); instead they acknowledged to him (his sovereignty). Then the Messenger of God said: 'By Him Who has sent me with truth! Had they done (the imprecation) the valley would have rained fire on them.' " Jābir said: "About them was revealed the verse: … *let us call our sons and your sons.* Jābir further said *our selves* refers to the Messenger of God and ʿAlī; and our sons to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and our women to Fāṭimah."

Author's comment: This tradition has been narrated by Ibn al-Maghāzilī in his *al-Manāqib* through his chains from the same al-Shaʿbī from Jābir; by al-Ḥammūyī in his *Farāʾid al-simṭayn,* through his chains from the same narrator; by al-Māliki in his *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimmah* from the same; by Abū David al-Ṭāyalisī from the same; and by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Durr al-manthūr* from al-Ḥākim (who has said that this tradition is correct), and from Ibn Marduwayh as well as Abū Nuʿaym (in his *Dalāʾilu al-khayrāt*)—all from Jābir.

(12) Abū Nuʿaym has narrated in his *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt* through the chain of al-Kalbī from Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said: "Verily a delegation of the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of God, and there were fourteen persons of their nobles. Among them were al-Sayyid (and he was the leader) and al-ʿĀqib, the second in rank and a man of good judgment among them." (Then he has described the event as given above.) (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(13) al-Bayhaqī has narrated in his *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah* through the

chain of Salmah b. ʿAbd Yashūʿ from his father from his grandfather that he said: "The Messenger of God wrote to the people of Najrān, before the (chapter of) Ṭā Sīn[1] was revealed: 'In the name of God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of God to the Bishop of Najrān and the people of Najrān. If you accept Islam, then I extol before you God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Now after (the praise of God), I call you to the worship of God leaving aside the worship of the servants (of God), and I invite you to (come under) the guardianship of God instead of the guardianship of the servants. But if you refuse (it), then (you should pay) the head-tax; and if you refuse (even this), then I declare war against you. And peace (be on you).'

When the Bishop read the letter, he was shocked and extremely terrified. So he sent (someone) to call a man of Najrān Shuraḥbīl b. Wadāʿah by name; and gave him the letter of the Prophet and he read it. Then the Bishop said to him: 'What is your opinion?' Shuraḥbīl said: 'You surely know the promise which God made to Abraham about the prophethood in the progeny of Ishmael. Therefore, how can one be sure that it is not this very man? I would not give any opinion regarding the prophethood. If it were an opinion about a worldly matter, I would have advised you about it and made efforts on your behalf.' Then the Bishop called the people of Najrān one after another, but all said as Shuraḥbīl had said. Thereupon, they decided to send Shuraḥbīl b. Wadāʿah, ʿAbdullāh b. Shuraḥbīl and Jabbār b. Fayḍ, so that they might bring them the (correct) news of the Messenger of God.

"So the delegation proceeded until they came to the Messenger of God. And he asked them (questions) and they asked him, and this questioning between him and them continued, until they said to him:

'What do you say about Jesus son of Mary?' The Messenger of God said: 'Today, I do not have anything about him; therefore you stay (here), in order that I may tell you tomorrow morning what is to be said about Jesus.' Then God sent down this verse:

1 That is, the 27th Chapter, the Ant. The author has proved, while writing the traditions under the next verse, that this particular tradition is false. (Trans.)

Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust …

and bring about the curse of God on the liars.

"But they refused to agree to that (truth). Thus, when the next morning came after the Messenger of God had given them that information, he proceeded for the imprecation to a place thick with trees that belonged to him, carrying al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and Fāṭimah was walking behind him; and he had many wives those days (but did not take any of them with him). And Shuraḥbīl said to his two companions: 'Surely, I see a (serious) matter coming (to us). If this man is a prophet sent (by God) and we ventured to imprecate against him, there would not remain on the face of the earth any hair or claw of us (that is, any cattle or bird belonging to us), but it will perish.' They said to him: 'What is your view?' He said: 'My opinion is that we should leave the judgment to him, because I see (in him) a man who will never exceed the proper limits in his decision.' They said: 'You may do as you like in this matter.' Thereupon, Shuraḥbīl met the Messenger of God and said: 'I have thought (of one thing) better than the imprecation against you.' He said: And what is it?' He said: '(We give you the authority) to decide (between us) this day up to the night and from the night to the (next) morning. Whatever you will decide will be binding on us.'

"So the Messenger of God returned without doing imprecation, and made agreement with them on the head-tax." (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(14) Ibn Jarīr has narrated from ʿIlbāʾ b. Aḥmar al-Yashkurī that he said: "When the verse was revealed: … *then say: 'Let us call our sons and your sons '*, the Messenger of God sent (someone) to (call) ʿAlī, Fāṭimah and their sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and invited the Jews to enter into imprecation against them. Then a young Jew said: 'Woe unto you! Are you not familiar with (the story) of your brothers who were yesterday transformed into monkeys and pigs? Do not enter into (this) imprecation.' So they desisted (from it)." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: This tradition supports the view that the pronoun "this" in the opening sentence, *disputes with you in this,* refers to "truth" in the preceding verse, *The truth is from your Lord.* In this way, the order of

imprecation would cover other matters too, besides the controversy about Jesus son of Mary. In that case, it would be another story[1] after the events which took place with the delegation of Najrān as narrated in numerous traditions which supports each other, and a large portion of which has been quoted above.

(15) Ibn Ṭāwūs has written in *Saʿdu al-suʿud:* "I saw in the book Mā *nazala min al-Qurʾani fi al-Nabiyyi wa Ahli baytih* (by Muḥammad bal-ʿAbbās b. Marwān) that he has narrated the tradition of the imprecation through fifty-one chains from the Companions and others; and some of them are: al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on them both), ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās, Bakr b. Sammāl, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās, Abū Rāfiʿ (slave of the Prophet), Jābir b. ʿAbdillāh, al-Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib and Anas b. Mālik."

(16) Likewise (Ibn Shahrāshūb) has narrated this tradition in *al-Manāqib,* from a number of narrators and exegetes. al-Suyūṭī has done the same in *al-Durr al-manthūr.*

A very strange thing has been written by an exegete who said:

"The traditions unanimously say that the Prophet selected ʿAlī, Fāṭimah and their two sons for the imprecation; and they apply the word *our women* to Fāṭimah, and *our selves* to ʿAlī only. The source of these traditions are the Shīʿahs, and their motive in this respect is well-known. They have tried as much as they could to propagate such traditions until it has spread among a vast number of the Sunnīs too.

"But those who forged these traditions did not succeed in properly fitting their interpretation on the verse. When an Arab says, 'our women' he never means his daughter—especially when he has wives too. Such thing is not known in their language. Even more far-fetched is the claim that 'our selves' means ʿAlī. Moreover, the delegation of Najrān—concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed—had not come to Medina with their women and children.

"The only thing which the verse shows is that the Prophet was ordered to call the People of the Book (who were disputing with

1 This tradition is not supported by other traditions or history. (Trans.)

him about Jesus) to gather all—men, women and children—together; and he was to gather the believers—men, women and children—together, in order that they might earnestly pray to God to curse the party which was in the wrong regarding its claim about Jesus.

"Such thing would prove that the Prophet had strong conviction of the truth of his claim and had utmost confidence in it. And likewise, the desistence of those who were challenged to imprecation—the Christians or other People of the Book—would show that they had no confidence in their own claim and were disputing not for the purpose of ascertaining the truth; their belief was shaky and they had no clear proofs. How can a believer in God agree to gather such a group—consisting of the truthful ones and the liars—in one place to fix their attention to God asking for His curse, to pray to remove the liars from His mercy? Can anyone be more daring than such a person? Can anything be more mocking to the Divine Power and Majesty than this?

"The Prophet and the believers had full confidence in the truth of what they believed about Jesus. It may be understood from the words of God, *after what has come to you of knowledge;* because knowledge in matters of belief means certainty only.

"The words of God, *let us call our sons and your sons …,* may be interpreted in either of the two ways:

"First: Each group should call the other; you should call our sons and we should call your sons and likewise about the other two categories of women and selves.

"Second: Each group should call his family. We, the Muslims, should call our sons, women and ourselves, and you should do likewise with your family.

"There is no difficulty in either case in calling the 'selves'. The difficulty arises when this phrase is restricted to one person, as the Shīʿahs and their followers do."

Comment: This is such a non-sense that no knowledgeable person would ever like to write it in academic books; and perhaps someone might venture to say that we have wrongly attributed it to such a renowned man! Yet, we have quoted it in full to show how low a man can sink in misapprehension and jaundiced views because of his bias and prejudice. He goes on demolishing what he had earlier built, and reconfirms what he

had rejected before, without caring or even knowing what he was doing. Also, we wanted evil to be known to all, so that they could protect themselves from it.

We may comment on this talk in two ways:

To show that the verse proves utmost excellence and superiority of ʿAlī. But it is a subject more appropriate for the books of theology, and is not so much related to our subject, that is, explanation of the meanings of the Qur'anic verses.

To review what the above exegete has written about the meaning of the verse of imprecation and concerning the traditions showing what had happened between the Prophet and the Christians of Najrān. This comes within the purview of exegesis, and we shall deal with it here.

You have already seen what the verse means. And the numerous traditions (which support each other), quoted by us, perfectly fit the meaning of the verse. If you ponder on what we have written earlier, you will see where and how his innovated "proof" has gone wrong, and at what points his blinkered vision has made him stumble. Here are some details:

He says:

> "The source of these traditions are the Shīʿahs, and their motive in this respect is well-known. They have tried as much as they could to propagate such traditions until it has spread among a vast number of the Sunnīs too."

This he says after admitting that the traditions are unanimous! Would that I knew which traditions he speaks about. Does he mean the above mentioned traditions which support and strengthen each other, which the scholars of traditions have unanimously accepted and narrated? They are not one, two or three; they are countless in number. The traditionalists have quoted them with one voice; the compilers of traditions have written them in their books, including Muslim and al-Tirmidhī in their collections of 'correct' traditions; and the historians have confirmed them by describing the events in a similar way. The exegetes of the Qur'an have unanimously quoted and copied them, without expressing any doubt or leveling any objection against them—and there are among them stalwarts of traditions and history, like al-Ṭabarī, Abu al-Fidāʾ, Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī etc.

And who were those Shīʿahs who were the source of this story? Does he mean those companions who narrated it in the first place? Like Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās, Jābir b. ʿAbdillāh, ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās and others? Or the

disciples of the companions who took this tradition from them and conveyed it to others? Like Abū Ṣāliḥ, al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, al-Shaʿbī and others? Does he want to say that those companions and their disciples became Shīʿahs—just because they narrated a tradition which he does not like? It is these companions and disciples—together with other like them—who are the final links in the chains of the narrators of the Prophet's traditions. Discard them, and you will be left neither with any tradition nor any biography of the Prophet. How can a Muslim—nay, even a non-Muslim researcher—aspire to know the details of the Prophet's message, if he rejects the traditions? How can he know the teachings and laws brought by the Messenger of God? The Qur'an clearly upholds the authority of the sayings and actions of the Prophet; and declares that the religion is based on his life. Reject the authority of the traditions and you have lost the Qur'an as well; there will remain no trace of the Divine Book, nor will there be any fruit of this revelation.

Or perhaps he thinks that the Shīʿahs have interpolated and surreptitiously inserted these traditions in the books of traditions and history? But then the problem, instead of going away, would rather increase and be more overwhelming: the tradition will lose its authority and the shariah will be nullified.

He says:

> "They apply the word *our women* to Fāṭimah and *our selves* to ʿAlī."

Probably he wants to say that according to the Shīʿahs, the words our women and our selves literally mean only Fāṭimah and ʿAlī respectively. Perhaps he got the idea from an earlier quoted tradition in which Jābir said: *Our selves* refers to the Messenger of God and ʿAlī; … *and our women* to Fāṭimah. But obviously he has not understood its meaning. The traditions do not say so. They only mean that because the Prophet when acting on the verse, did not bring (any other person for imprecation) except ʿAlī and Fāṭimah, it made it clear that she was the only one worthy of being included in the category our women, as he was the only one qualified for the category *our selves;* and likewise al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn were the only two for the category *our sons.* The words: sons, women and selves taken together meant the family. Therefore, these four were the family of the Messenger of God and his closest relatives, as we have seen in some traditions that he said after coming with them at the appointed place: "O God! These are the people of my house." The sentence implies: I did not

find anyone whom I could call, except these four.

That this is the correct explanation may be seen in the wording of some traditions which say: *our selves* refers to the Messenger of God and ʿAlī." It clearly shows that the tradition aims at describing who had come under which category—not at explaining the literal meaning of the words.

He says:

> "But those who forged these traditions did not succeed in properly fitting their interpretation on the verse. When an Arab says *our women* he never means his daughter—especially when he has got wives too. Such thing is not known in their language. Even more far-fetched is the claim that *our selves* means ʿAlī."

First he has given an imaginary meaning to the traditions, then he uses it as an excuse to discard all those narrations—in spite of their numerousness, in spite of their great number. Then he discredits its narrators and all those who have accepted them by accusing them of the crime of Shīʿism! Had he been a true seeker of knowledge, he should have studied the books of exegesis, and remembered the vast multitude of the masters of eloquence and authorities of rhetorics, since they have quoted and written these traditions in their books of exegesis and other subjects without any hesitation, without any objection.

Look at the author of *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf.* He is a recognized authority on Arabic language, grammar and literature. He has often pronounced judgment on various recitations of the Qur'an, showing why a certain recitation was not in keeping with the norms of language or usage. And see what he has to say about this verse:

> "And this verse contains a proof—unsurpassed in strength—of the excellence of the people of the mantle, peace be on them. And there is in it a clear proof of the truth of the prophethood of the Prophet, because nobody—either a supporter or an antagonist—has ever narrated that they (the Christians) answered that call (for imprecation)."

How come that those giants of rhetorics and champions of literature could not realize that these traditions—in spite of their vast multitude and their repeated narrations in the books of traditions—accuse the Qur'an of using incorrect expression by employing a plural (women) for one woman only?

Not, by my life! This exegete is in fact confused; he does not know the difference between the literal meaning of a word and its application.

Obviously, his thinking goes like this:

> "God said to His Prophet, *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves …* Now if we admit that the disputers at that time were the delegates of Najrān numbering according to some traditions, fourteen men; and that there were no women or children with them; and if after that we admit that when the Messenger of God went for the imprecation, he had with him only: ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, then the phrase, *whoever disputes with you,* would literally mean the delegation of Najrān; *our women* would mean one woman; *our selves* would mean one 'self'; and *your sons* and *your women* would become words without meaning because there were neither women nor sons in that delegation!"

I wonder why he forgot to add that it would also mean use of *our sons* (a plural, meaning at least three sons) for only two sons, because it is more repugnant than the use of plural for singular. Since post-classical period, people have been using plural in place of singular—although such use is not found in the classical Arabic, except when done as a mark of respect. But the use of plural for dual is an unheard thing—it has no justification at all.

However, it was this trend of thought which led him to discard all these traditions, saying that they were forged. But he has completely misunderstood the talk.

The fact is that an eloquent talk conforms with the situation which it is related to, and throws light on what in a given context is important to explain. Sometimes the talk is between two strangers, neither knowing the other's life condition. Then they use normal expressions which are applied in general talk. Suppose two groups are facing each other; one of them wants the other to know that their conflict is deep-rooted, and that the whole tribe—men and women, elders and youngsters—shall continue the fight till the last. In such a situation, he will say: We shall fight you with our men, women and children. Now this sentence is based on the assumption that normally and naturally a tribe does have women and children. The statement aims at making it clear to the enemy that the speaker's tribe is one in its determination to fight against their adversary.

On the other hand, if he were to say, "We shall fight against you

with our men, a woman and two sons", it would be a superfluous detail, uncalled for in this context—unless there be some good reason for it in a particular situation.

But when the talk is between friends who know each other's family, then it may be couched in general terms. For example, one may say while inviting the other to his home: We are at your service—we ourselves as well as our women and children. Or, he may wish to be more specific and say: All of us will be at your service—the men, the daughter and the two children.

In short, normal way of expression is one thing and its application on real facts is another matter. Sometimes they may coincide, at other times they may be different. If a man speaks in normal and general terms and then it appears that the real situation is different, he is not accused of telling a lie.

This verse is based on the same principal. Accordingly the words, … *then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves …* , means as follows: Tell them that you are coming with your closest relatives who are your partners in your claim and knowledge, and invite them to come with their closest relatives. Thus, the verse proceeds in the normal way assuming that the Messenger of God had in his family men, women and sons, and the Christian delegates had likewise men, women and sons in their families; it was a challenge couched in general and usual terms. But when the time came to act on that challenge, it was found that the Prophet did not have any men, women and sons except one man, one woman and two sons, while his adversaries had no woman or son with them—there were only men in their group. But this difference in implementation did not falsify the challenge. That is why when the Prophet came out with one man, one woman and two sons, the Christians did not accuse him of lying or of not fulfilling the conditions; nor did they cover their refusal by saying that the Prophet had told them to bring their women and sons which they did not have with them at that time and therefore they were unable to enter into imprecation. Also, it was because of this that those who heard this story never imagined that it was a forgery.

The above explanation also shows the absurdity of his assertion where he says: "Moreover, the delegation of Najrān—concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed—had not come to Medina with their women and children."

He says:

> "The only thing which the verse shows is that the Prophet was ordered to call the People of the Book (who were disputing with him about Jesus) to gather all—men, women and children—together; and he was to gather the believers—men, women and children—together; in order that they might earnestly pray to God to curse the party which was in the wrong in its claim about Jesus How can a believer in God agree to gather such a group—consisting of the truthful ones and the liars—in one place to fix their attention to God asking for His curse, to pray to remove the liars from His mercy? Can anyone be more daring than such a person? Can anything be more mocking to the Divine Power and Majesty than this?"

In short, the verse invites both parties to gather together with their "selves," their women and their sons in one place and then to earnestly pray for God's curse on the liars. Now let us find out what is the meaning of this gathering which he talks about.

Was it a call to gather together all the believers and all the Christians? But the believers at that time[1] included all, or almost all, Arabs of the tribes of Rabīʿah and Muḍar residing from Yemen and Hijāz to Iraq and beyond. And the Christians included those in Najrān (then forming a part of Yemen), Syria and the regions around the Mediterranean sea; the Romans and the Franks, as well as the people of the Britain, Austria and other places.

Such a vast multitude of people, scattered from the East to the West, must have exceeded millions upon millions, counting men, women and children all together. There can be no doubt whatsoever in the mind of a sane person that it was almost impossible for all of them to gather in one place. Normal ways and means reject such a proposition altogether. If the Qur'an had offered this proposal then it had asked for an impossible. It would mean that the Prophet was offering a conditional proof for the authenticity of his claim—and the condition, on which it depended, was an impossible one! It would have given an excuse—a valid excuse—to the Christians not to accept his call of imprecation; in fact it would have been

1 It was the 9th year after *Hijrah* according to some historians, and the 10th according to others. But both timings are open to question, as we shall describe when writing the "Traditions" related to the next verses. (Auth.)

more damaging to his claim, rather than weakening their case.

Or, does he mean that it was a call to gather from both groups only those who were present thereby—the believers of Medina and nearby places, and the Christians of Najrān and the places in its vicinity? This alternative—although less absurd than the preceding one—was no less impossible. Who was capable that day of gathering all the residents of Medina and Najrān and their neighboring places, not leaving a single woman and child out, in one place for the intended imprecation? Such proposal would have been an admission that the truth was impossible to prove, because the proof depended on an impossible condition.

Or, was it a call covering only those who were actively engaged in the disputation and arguments? That is, the Prophet and the believers around him, and the delegation of the Christians of Najrān. But then his own objection would boomerang: "Moreover, the delegation of Najrān concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed—had not come to Medina with their women and children." So the problem would not go away.

Further he says:

> "The Prophet and the believers had full confidence in the truth of what they believed about Jesus. It may be understood from the words of God, *after what has come to you of knowledge;* because knowledge in matters of belief means certainty only."

It is true that the knowledge, as used in this verse, means certainty. But would that I knew where does it say that the believers were sure of the truth of their belief concerning Jesus? The verse does not speak about anyone except the Prophet in singular pronouns: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say*. And there was no reason why the verse should have addressed anyone except the Prophet alone; the Christians' delegation had only one aim before their eyes—to dispute and argue with the Prophet. It was not their intention to meet the believers; they had not argued at all with the believers, nor had the believers spoken to them.

If the verse shows at all that anyone other than the Prophet had attained knowledge and certainty, it does so about those whom the Prophet had brought with himself for imprecation, as we have inferred from the words, *and bring about the curse of Allah on the liars.*

On the other hand, the Qur'an shows that not all the believers had attained knowledge and certainty. For example:

And most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others

(with Him) (12:106).

Here God announces their polytheism. How can polytheism coexist with certainty?

And when the hypocrites and those in whose heart was a disease began to say: Allah and His Messenger did not promise us (victory) but only to deceive (33:12).

And those who believe say: "Why has not a chapter been revealed?" But when a decisive chapter is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein you see those in whose hearts is a disease look to you with the look of one fainting because of death. Woe to them then! Those it is whom Allah has cursed so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes (47:20–23).

The fact is that certainty was attained by only a few of the followers of the Prophet who had got clear sight. God says:

But if they dispute with you, say: I have submitted myself (entirely) to Allah and (so has) every one who follows me (3:20).

Say: This is my way, I invite (you) unto Allah; with clear sight (which) land he who follows me (possess) (12:108).

He says:

> "The words of God, *let us call our sons and your sons* may be interpreted in either of the two ways: First: Each group should call the others; you should call our sons and we should call your sons; and likewise about the other two categories of women and selves."

You have already seen in the Commentary that this interpretation (which he gives as his first choice) is totally absurd and not in conformity with the wordings of the verse. So far as the call for imprecation was concerned, it would have sufficed to say: Come, let us earnestly pray and bring about the curse of God on the liars. Why then were the remaining phrases added: *Let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our 'selves' and your 'selves'*? These phrases were meant to bind each party to bring for the imprecation its dearest and precious-most things, that is, the sons, the women and the selves. This challenge could be meaningful only if each party was to bring its own sons, women and selves. It would lose its meaning completely if it was interpreted as he says: You should call our sons, women and selves and we should call your sons, women and selves.

Moreover, common sense rejects this interpretation. Why should the Messenger of God give the Christians power and authority over their sons and women? Because only after getting that power and authority could

each party call the other's sons and women and bring them at the place of imprecation. Surely the aim could be achieved in a better way if each party called its own sons and women.

Further, as we have shown above, this interpretation makes it necessary to add in the verse the idea of giving someone the power and authority over others. But how and on what ground can we do so? The truth is that this interpretation is absolutely wrong. Only the other interpretation is correct—that each party was to call its own family members.

He says:

> "There is no difficulty in either case in calling the 'selves'. The difficulty arises when this phrase is restricted to one person, as the Shīʿahs and their followers do."

The difficulty, to which he refers, arises from the following objection: How can a man call himself? But this objection has nothing to do with either interpretation. It has been leveled against the explanation that *our selves* means the Messenger of God himself. Reportedly during one religious discussion, one group said that *our selves* referred to the Messenger of God, not to ʿAlī. The opposite party said that it would imply that he called himself, which is manifestly wrong. (See the second tradition, quoted from *ʿUyun al-akhbār*.

It will be seen from the above that his claim that "the difficulty arises from the Shīʿahs' interpretation," is absolutely wrong. The Shīʿahs say that the word, *our selves,* means the men from the family of the Prophet; and when the order was implemented, it was applied to the Messenger of God and ʿAlī (blessings and peace be on them!). And there could be no difficulty in their calling one another.

Accordingly, no objection can be directed at the Shīʿahs, even according to the interpretation which he ascribes to them, that *our selves* means ʿAlī. What difficulty could there be if the Messenger of God was to call ʿAlī?

His disciple[1] has written in *al-Manār,* after mentioning some traditions: "Ibn ʿAsākir has narrated from Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad from his father in explanation of the verse, *then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons* … 'Then (the Prophet) brought Abū Bakr and his son, ʿUmar and his son, and ʿUthmān and his son.' " Then he comments: "Apparently the verse speaks about a group of the believers." Thereafter he has copied the above

1 That is, Rashīd Riḍā, author of *Tafsīr al-Manār*. (Trans.)

quoted writing of his teacher, and then has opined as follows: "As you see the verse orders women to participate with men in national struggles and religious wars. It is based on the principle of equality between men and women even in public affairs—except where an exception has been made. (Then he goes on elaborating the same points.)

Comment: As for the tradition which he has quoted, it is an isolated and peculiar one and goes against all the other traditions on this subject; and needless to say that the other traditions are so numerous and so well known. That is why the exegetes have not mentioned it. Moreover, it contains statements which do not tally with the facts: It supposes that all the people mentioned therein had sons, but surely not all of them had sons at that time.

He says:

"Apparently the verse speaks about a group of the believers."

Probably, he wants to infer from the tradition (quoted by him) that the Messenger of God had brought there all the believers and their children; thus the words that the Prophet, "brought Abū Bakr and his son" would indirectly imply that he brought all the believers. In this way he wants to support the interpretation of his teacher, discussed above. But you see how isolated, shunned and discarded this tradition is; and how defective is its text. Apart from that it does not give the meaning he infers from it.

Now look at the principle adduced by him that women should participate in the public affairs just as men do. If his reasoning is accepted then it would also prove that small children too should participate in those affairs with their elders. This one point alone is enough to show the falsity of his observation.

We have talked at length on the subject of the women's participation, under the verses of divorce in the second volume[1] and we shall be writing some more in a relevant place there is no need to make such inferences as he has done from this verse.

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1 Vide vol. 4 (Eng. trans.). (Trans.)

Verses 64–78

Now begins the second phase of the exposition of the People of the Book, particularly the Christians, and some related matters.

The preceding verses described the condition of the People of the Book generally, beginning with the verse 3:19 (*Surely the religion with Allah is Islam …*), taking a turn at the verse 3:23 (*Have you not considered those who are given a portion of the Book?*). Then it focused its attention on the Christians beginning with the verse 3:33 (*Surely Allah chose Adam and Noah)*, guiding the believers earlier, in the verse 3:28, not to take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers (*Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers*).

This was the first phase.

Now, the same subjects are explained in other words and in a different style. First, it comments on the People of the Book in general. Apart from the verses under discussion, it throws light on various relevant matters in other places; for example: *Say: O People of the Book! why do you disbelieve in the signs of Allah?* (3:98); *Say: O People of the* Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of God?" (3:99). Secondly, it exposes the condition of the Christians and their belief concerning Jesus: *It is not meet for a man that Allah should give him the Book, and the wisdom and prophethood, then he should say to men: Be my servants …* (3:79). Then the talk turns to the matters related to the believers calling them to submission and unity and warning them of befriending the unbelievers and being intimate with them in preference to the believers. All these things are explained in numerous verses and in various places.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(3:64) ***Say: O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you, that we shall not worship any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us***

shall not take others for lords besides Allah; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones).

This call is addressed to all the People of the Book in general. The invitation to "come to a word" really means to unite on the meaning of the word by acting upon it. The call to the word is based on the idiom found in Arabic and other languages, as for example, they say: The nation is united on this word. It implies the meanings of belief, acknowledgment, recognition and propagation. The verse therefore means: Come let us adhere to this word, cooperating with one another in its propagation and acting on its demands.

"Common between us and you" means that you and we both are equally bound to acknowledge it and to act on it. Obviously, the use of this adjective for "word" is metaphorical. What is actually equal is its acknowledgment and the resulting action. Again action is related to the import of the word, not the word itself. Moreover, the call for unity about the word in itself has metaphorical connotation. In this way, this sentence has many fine points of rhetorics: Calling to unite on a meaning, then using the "word" for the meaning and then ascribing the adjective "common" to the "word".[1]

Also, it has been said that the "common word" refers to that which the Qur'an, the Torah and the Injīl commonly invite to with one voice—and that is the belief of monotheism. If this suggestion is correct then the next words, "that we shall not worship any but God …," would serve as the correct explanation of the word common between the Muslims and the People of the Book; it would invite the latter to leave aside their own interpretation of the Oneness of God—the interpretation used to fit this pristine "word" on their own desire; for example, their belief that God was incarnated, took a son, was one but had three persons; their worship of their rabbis, priests and bishops. The meaning in that case would be as follows: Come to a word common between us and you, and that is the belief in One God; and if we unite on it then we would have to discard and reject all that is associated with God, and would not take others for lords besides Him.

But the ending of the verse, "but if they turn back, then say: 'Bear

1 *al-Sawā'* is a *maṣdar*, although it is commonly used as an adjective to denote a thing both sides of which are equal. (Auth.)

witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones)' ," supports the first meaning given by us. In short, the verse calls to this word that "we shall not worship any but God …," as it is the demand of Islam, the total submission, which is the religion with God. Although submission is also a concomitant of the belief in the Oneness of God, the verse calls the People of the Book not to the theoretical, but practical, monotheism; that is, to discard worshipping anyone but God. (Think over it).

…that we shall not worship any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah: It is the explanation of "the common word," and it is what submission to God demands. The words, "we shall not worship any but God," reject the worship of any other than God; it is not their aim to prove or affirm the worship of God. We have already mentioned in the explanation of the "creed"—There is no god except God—that the phrase, "except God," is not an exception but an appositional substantive for another substantive of "god" (*al-badal*); consequently, the sentence aims at rejecting partners for God, not at affirming the existence of God[1]. According to the Qur'an, existence of God and His being the Truth needs no proof, it is a self-evident reality.

This sentence calls them not to associate anyone to God in worship. But it does not nullify the other types of polytheism emanating from the belief that God had a son or the idea of trinity and things like that. That is why the call continues: "And (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides God." The fact is that merely saying that a worship is meant for God does not make it the worship of God, unless it is done with pure and sincere faith, unless the heart is purged of all beliefs and superstitions springing from polytheism. Otherwise, the worship would be for a god who had a partner. And a worship devoted to one of the alleged partners in godhead—even if it is done for him exclusively—would still be a product of polytheism. Why? because such a worship, by its very definition is a share devoted to one of the two or more partners; as such it acknowledges the right of the other partner or partners, and is therefore the worship of those partners too.

On the other hand, the Prophet calls them, by order of God, to the pure monotheism, "that we shall not worship any but God and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take

1 See *al-Mīzān* (Eng. trans.), vol. 2, under verse 2:163. (Trans.)

others for lords besides God." It is this call which combines in itself all the aims and objectives of prophethood; it is this which the prophets taught their men, and which they propagated in the human society.

We have described (while explaining the verse 2:213, *Mankind was but one people*) that prophethood is a God-inspired awakening, a true advancement, the purpose of which is to spread the word of religion. The religion, in its reality, is equilibrium in the society's march of life; and a well-balanced society creates well-balanced individual in life. In this way, each and everyone is accorded his due position which the nature has meant him to have. Thus, the society gets the freedom and the felicity of natural perfectness based on justice and equity; and likewise the individual gets complete freedom to enjoy the life in all its aspects, as he thinks fit and as he likes—except when it is likely to harm the society's life. And all these freedoms and enjoyments are conditional to servitude and submission to God, subservient to the unseen authority and power.

We may summarize the prophets' message in these words: They want human species—individually and collectively—to march forward according to the dictate of their nature which adheres to the belief of monotheism. That belief in its turn demands that man should base all his individual and social actions and activities on submission to God, and that he should spread justice and equity. In other words, all should be given equal rights in life, and all should have equal freedom of good intention and good deed.

This goal cannot be achieved until and unless the roots of conflict and unlawful transgression are completely destroyed; so that no strong person exploits or enslaves a weak man, no one dominates another, and no powerless person serves the interests of someone powerful. There is no god but God; there is no Lord except God; and there is no rule for anyone except God.

This is what this verse says: *that we shall not worship any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah.* There are many verses of the same connotation. For example, God quotes Joseph as saying: *O my two mates of the prison! are sundry lords better or Allah, the One, the Supreme? You do not worship besides Him but names which you have named, you and your fathers; Allah has not sent down any authority for them; judgment is only Allah's; He has commanded that you shall not worship aught but Him; this is the right religion* (12:39–40). Also, God says: *They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah, and* (also) *the Messiah*

son of Mary, and they were not enjoined but that they should worship one God only, there is no god but He (9:31).

And the same is the importance of many admonitions addressed to their peoples by the prophets like: Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Shuʿayb (Jethro), Moses and Jesus (peace be on them all). For example:

Noah: *My Lord! surely they have disobeyed me and followed him whose wealth and children have added to him nothing but loss* (71:21).

Hūd: *Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do. And you make strong fortresses that perhaps you may abide. And when you lay hands* (on men) *you lay hands* (like) *tyrants* (26:128–130).

Ṣāliḥ: *And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant ones* (26:151).

Abraham: *When he said to his father and his people: What are these images to whose worship you cleave? They said: We found our fathers worshipping them. He said: Certainly you have been,* (both) *you and your fathers, in manifest error* (21:52–54).

And God said to Moses and Aaron: *Go both to Pharaoh, surely he has become inordinate. So go you both to him and say: Surely we are two messengers of your Lord; therefore send the Children of Israel with us and do not torment them.* (20:43–47).

And lastly Jesus said to his people: *...and so that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in; so fear Allah and obey me* (43:63).

The natural religion is that which negates transgression and mischief, and eradicates injustice and unlawful dominations—the unjust dominations which destroy the foundation of happiness and uproot the basis of truth and reality. It was this fact which the Prophet alluded to when he said in the last pilgrimage (and al-Masʿūdī has mentioned it in his *Murūj al-dhahab,* in the events of the year 10 of Hijrah): "Indeed the time has come full circle to its (original) form (as it was) the day when God created the heavens and the earth." Perhaps he meant that the men have come back to the rule of nature because the Islamic character had become firmly rooted among them.

The sentence, *that we shall not worship any but Allah*, not only covers all the aims and objectives of prophethood, but also explains the reason of this commandment.

...that we shall not worship any but Allah: Godhead is that which everything worships, is bewildered about and loved—in every way. God is the origin and fountainhead of every perfection in all the things; in spite of their magnitude in number, they are related to one another and all are

one in that each component looks to God for its needs; He is the source of every perfection desired by these things. This reality leads us to the Oneness of God. As the created things are interrelated, the Creator can be no more than one. He is the Owner in Whose Hand is the management of everything. Therefore, it is obligatory to worship God, because He is the One and Only God, there is no partner or colleague to Him. And it is obligatory not to ascribe any partner to Him in worship. In other words, this universe with all that it contains cannot submit except to One Creator. These creatures are joined in a uniform system, they are united in their existence: naturally there cannot be more than one Lord for them, because there is not more than one Creator for them.

And (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides God: Human beings, in spite of their great number, are parts of one reality, that is, human species and humanity. All those merits and abilities which the hand of creation has put in them in equal measure demand that they must have equal rights in life, and must be accorded equal treatment in all those matters. On the other hand, there are differences in the conditions of the individuals and in their ability to procure and acquire some advantages and prerogatives of life; they are the gifts of general humanity which are bestowed to some particular individuals or groups here and there; such prerogatives also should be allowed to the mankind—but only in the way it demands. For example, sexual intercourse, pregnancy and medical treatment, all are the affairs of the humanity in general; yet sexual intercourse is the prerogative of an adult human being, male or female, while pregnancy is exclusively reserved for the female; and medical treatment is accorded only to a sick person.

In short, the members of the human society are components of a single reality—the components being similar to each other. No one has a right to impose his will on another, until and unless he takes on himself a similar burden on behalf of the other. And this is what cooperation in acquisition of life's advantages means. But if the society or individual surrenders to an individual, if the whole or a part of the humanity submits to another part; raising him from the level of equality to that of superiority, giving him domination and arbitrary powers, making him an autocratic despot—he rules as he likes, is obeyed in whatever he says, and is taken as a lord whose will has to be complied with—then it negates the nature and destroys the foundation of humanity.

Moreover, Lordship exclusively belongs to God, there is no lord but

He. Thus, if a man puts himself under the authority of another man like himself, allowing that master to do with his follower whatever he wants, then it means that the said master has been taken as a lord besides God. It is such a proposition which can never be accepted by him who has surrendered himself to God.

It is now clear that the words of God, "And (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides God," throw light on two realities: One, the human beings are parts of a single reality, the parts being similar to each other. Two, Lordship is the exclusive prerogative of Godhead.

...but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones): It is a call to them to witness that the Prophet and his followers are on a religion which God is pleased with, and it is Islam. God says: *Surely the religion with Allah is Islam* (3:19). This declaration will cut their argument and dispute, because no proof prevails against the truth and the people of the truth.

This sentence points to the fact that monotheism in worship is a concomitant to Islam.

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَتِ التَّوْرَاةُ وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(3:65) *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him? Do you not then understand?*

Apparently it is governed by the imperative verb, "say," placed in the preceding verse; and so are the verses 70–71, coming after four verses. Thus, it will be an order to the Prophet to say these things to the People of the Book. On the other hand, the verse coming after two verses (*Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe*), gives an association which shows that the verse under discussion too may be a direct talk of God, and not of the Prophet (by God's Command).

The People of the Book disputed among themselves about Abraham. Probably it was, in the beginning, an argument by which each group wanted to show its veracity. The Jews might be saying: Abraham, whom God has praised so much, was from us; a claim which the Christians might have countered by saying: Abraham was on truth, and the truth

has been manifested by the advent of Jesus. Then the arguments might have degenerated into bigotry and obstinacy. Then the Jews claimed that Abraham was a Jew; and the Christians, that he was a Christian. However, it is a known fact that Judaism and Christianity came on the scene after the revelation of the Torah and the Injīl respectively; and these Books were revealed long after Abraham. How could it be possible for him to be a Jew (a follower of the religion brought by Moses)? Or a Christian (a follower of the shariah of Jesus)? All that can be said about Abraham is this: He was on truth, sincerely adhering to right, away from wrong, submitting himself to God. These verses, therefore, have a connotation similar to the verse: *Or do you say that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Are you better knowing or Allah? And who is more unjust than he who conceals a testimony that he has from Allah?* (2:140).

هَا أَنْتُمْ هَٰؤُلَاءِ حَاجَجْتُمْ فِيمَا لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(3:66) ***Behold! you are they who disputed about that of which you had knowledge; why then do you dispute about that of which you have no knowledge? And Allah knows while you do not know.***

The verse affirms that they possessed a knowledge in respect of the disputation which they indulged in; and negates another knowledge and ascribes it to God. The exegetes have variously explained the knowledge which they had, and that which they did not. According to them it may mean as follows: 'You had disputed about Abraham and you had some knowledge about him, for example, that he existed at a certain time and was a prophet. Why then do you dispute about a matter of which you have no knowledge at all—claiming that he was a Jew or a Christian? The fact is that God knows while you do not know.' Alternatively, the knowledge that has been affirmed may refer to the little knowledge they had about Jesus. The verse thus says: 'You have disputed about Jesus while you had some knowledge about him and his affairs. Why do you then dispute about a subject of which you have no knowledge, claiming that Abraham was a Jew or a Christian?'

The above two explanations, given by the exegetes, do not conform with the apparent context of the verse. The first is wrong because the

People of the Book had never contended with each other about the existence or prophethood of Abraham. The second, because neither party was on right concerning their disputation about Jesus. Both were mistaken in their respective beliefs, making erroneous claims about him. How then can their disputation about Jesus be called a disputation of which they had knowledge? In any case, the verse says that they disputed about something of which they had knowledge and also about that of which they had no knowledge. The question arises as to what was the disputation about which they had knowledge? Moreover, it apparently shows that both disputes were among the People of the Book themselves. It does not refer to any argument between them and the Muslims; otherwise, the Muslims would obviously have been in wrong in that matter of which the People of the Book had knowledge.

The appropriate explanation would be as follows—and God knows better:

It is well known that there was a never ending dispute between the Jews and the Christians which covered all the subjects in which they differed. The main point of contention was the Jesus' prophethood and the claims made by the Christians concerning his status—that he was God and son of God, and the belief of trinity. The Christians disputed with the Jews about his being a prophet sent by God—and the Christians had its knowledge. The Jews disputed with the Christians and refuted his godhead, his sonship and the trinity—and they talked with knowledge about it. These were the disputations about which they had got knowledge. As for the disputation about that of which they had no knowledge, it was their contention that Abraham was a Jew or a Christian.

When the Qur'an says that they had no knowledge of this matter, it does not mean that they were unaware of the fact that the Torah and the Injīl were revealed after Abraham—as it was an obvious thing. Nor that they were oblivious of the fact that a preceding man cannot be a follower of one coming after him, because the admonition at the end of the preceding verse (*Do you not then understand?*) does not leave room for this suggestion; it shows that it is such an obvious thing that a mere hint is enough to focus attention on it. They knew that Abraham preceded the Torah and the Injīl, but they were oblivious of its logical corollary that he therefore could not be a Jew or a Christian, that he would be on the Divine Religion, that is, submission to God.

The Jews also said: There cannot be more than one true religion and

that is the Judaism. Thus, Abraham would inevitably be a Jew. The same argument was used by the Christians to Christianize Abraham. The error they committed in this argument sprang from ignorance, not obliviousness. The fact is that the religion of God is one—and that is Islam, the submission to God. It is one, progressing towards perfection, with passage of time and in keeping with mankind's progress—as humanity advances to perfection. Judaism and the Christianity are two branches of the perfection of Islam—the root religion. The prophets (peace be on them all!) were the builders of that structure, each of them had a hand in it, laying down the foundation and raising such a lofty edifice. No doubt, Abraham was the founder of Islam—that is, submission to God—and it was the basic and true religion; then the true religion appeared with the name of Judaism and then Christianity; these were two of the branches of its perfection, two of the stages of its completion. What the Jews and the Christians did not know was that these propositions do not make Abraham a Jew or a Christian. He would remain, as before, an upright Muslim; his name would be always linked with that of Islam, the religion which he himself had founded. Islam is the root of Judaism and Christianity; but it is neither Judaism nor Christianity. The root is not attributed to its branches; it is the branch that should be related to the root.

To say that Abraham was a Muslim and not a Jew or a Christian does not imply a claim that he was the follower of the Prophet of Islam, acting according to the Qur'anic shariah. Nobody should rush to say that as Abraham had preceded the revelation of the Torah and the Injīl and therefore could not be counted as a Jew or a Christian, so had he preceded the revelation of the Qur'an and the advent of Islam, therefore, in a completely identical manner, he should not be called a Muslim.

As a matter of fact, the use of 'Islam' for the Qur'anic shariah is a terminology which came up after the revelation of the Qur'an, when the fame of the religion brought by Muḥammad, had spread far and wide. The Islam which is attributed to Abraham means submission to God, humbling oneself before His Lordship. The two uses are different, and consequently there is no room for any objection whatsoever.

The People of the Book were unaware of the true meaning of the basic religion; they did not know that it was a reality which had various levels, and which had evolved, passing through stages, to the summit of its perfection. It was this ignorance of theirs to which God refers when He says: "And God knows while you do not know. Abraham was not a

Jew nor a Christian …" This meaning is also supported by the next verse: "Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe;" as well as the verses 84–85 coming later: *Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit. And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.* (We shall explain it in its place.)

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَٰكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(3:67) ***Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.***

This verse has been explained above. Some exegetes have explained it as follows: The Jews and the Christians claimed that Abraham was one of them, on their religion. Likewise, the idol-worshipping Arabs claimed that they were the followers of *al-dīn al-ḥanīf* (the upright religion) the religion of Abraham; even the People of the Book came to call them *al-ḥunafā* and thus *al-ḥanīfiyyah* (uprightness; religion of Abraham) was misconstrued to mean idol-worship.

When God praised Abraham by saying that "he was upright," it was necessary to explain the word, so that people should not take it in the sense of idol-worship. That is why God added the words, "A Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists;" he followed the religion which God is pleased with, and that is Islam, submission to God, and he was not a polytheist like the Arabs of the days of Ignorance.

إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَٰذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(3:68) ***Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe; and Allah is the Guardian of the believers.***

This verse gives the reason behind the foregoing talk, and explains the reality of the subject matter. The meaning is as follows (and God knows better):

If we look at relationship between this great Prophet, Abraham, and those who came after him, obviously he cannot be counted as a follower of later generations; rather, we have to decide who is nearest of all to him. Only he can be nearest of all to a prophet—coming with a shariah and a Book—who follows the truth like him and accepts the religion which he brought. According to this criterion, the nearest to Abraham is this Prophet and those who believe. They are on the Islam for which God had chosen Abraham. Likewise, those who were his followers were nearest to him—not those who disbelieve in the communications of God and confound the truth with falsehood.

The words, "those who followed him," are an allusion against the People of the Book, indirectly telling the Jews and the Christians that they were not the nearest to Abraham because they did not follow him in submitting to God.

The phrase, "And this Prophet and those who believe," distinguishing the Prophet and his followers from the followers of Abraham; this was done to show the exalted position of the Prophet; he was too great to be called someone's follower. The same consideration is reflected in other verses; for example, *These are they whom Allah guided, therefore follow their guidance* (6:90). Note that God did not say, 'therefore follow them'.

The sentence, "And God is the Guardian of the believers," complete this reasoning and explanation. Abraham was a *waliyy* (friend) of God, and his *al-wilāyah* (friendship, guardianship) was a part of God's guardianship; and God is the Guardian of the believers, not of the others who disbelieve in His Signs and confuse the right with wrong, the truth with falsehood.

وَدَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يُضِلُّونَكُمْ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(3:69) ***A party of the People of the Book desire that they should lead you astray, and they lead not astray but themselves, and they do not perceive.***

How is it that the People of the Book lead not astray but themselves?

The first and foremost human virtue is inclination towards truth and its acceptance. A desire to divert the people away from the truth, to turn them towards falsity (being a psychological trait) is a depravity of soul and how evil this depravity is! It is a sin, a crime, a transgression against truth; and what is there after the truth but lie and error? Thus, when they desire to lead the believers astray (when those believers are on truth), they in fact lead themselves astray although they do not perceive it.[1]

And even if they got hold of a believer and led him astray by planting some doubts in his heart, they would be leading themselves astray before him. Man does not do anything—good or bad—but for himself. God says: *Whoever does good, it is for his own self, and whoever does evil, it is against it* (45:46). As for those who go astray because of someone's misguidance, it is not so much a result of that deceiver's influence, as the misdeed and wrong choice of the straying person himself—by permission of God. The Qur'an says: *Whoever disbelieves, he shall be responsible for his disbelief, and whoever does good, they prepare (good) for their own souls* (30:44); *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and (yet) He pardons most (of your faults). And you cannot escape in the earth, and you shall not have a guardian or a helper besides Allah* (42:30–31). Some details about the effects and characteristics of human actions have been given in the second volume (Arabic text), under the verse: … *these it is whose deeds are forfeited in this world and the hereafter* (2:217).[2]

This explanation is among those Qur'anic realities which spring from *al-Tawḥīd* (monotheism) of action, and that active belief in its turn is based on the realities of Lordship and Kingdom. Only in this way, we can explain the exclusiveness found in the words of God: "And they lead not astray but themselves, and they do not perceive." As for the explanation given by others, they do not help in understanding this exclusiveness; that is why we have not mentioned them here at all.

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1 *al-Ṭā'ifah* (wanderer, rover, walker about). The people, and especially Arabs, used to live—in the beginning—a nomadic life; their tribes and clans used to wander around with their cattle looking for water and pasture, from season to season; they travelled in groups as a safety measure against attack and assassination. They were then called "A wandering party"; gradually the noun, 'party' was dropped, and the adjective *al-Ṭā'ifah* took its place. (Auth.)

2 See *al-Mīzān* (Eng. trans.), vol. 3. (Trans.)

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(3:70) *O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allah while you witness (them)?*

It has already been explained that disbelieving in communications of God is not the same as disbelieving in God Himself. Disbelief in God entails open rejection of monotheism, as the idol-worshippers and atheists do; while disbelief in communications means rejection of the Divine Knowledge after it is clarified and explained. The People of the Book do believe that the universe has One God. What they disbelieve in are described in the books revealed to them and to others, like the prophethood of Muḥammad , the fact that Jesus was the servant and the messenger of God, that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, that the hand of God is open, that God is Self-sufficient and other such things. The People of the Book, in Qur'anic language, are disbelievers in communications of God, not in God Himself. Of course, there is the verse which goes against it: *Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Messenger have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, from among those who were given the Book, until they pay the jizyah* (tributary tax) *with their hands while they are in a state of subjection* (9:29). It clearly says that those People of the Book did not believe in God, that is, they disbelieved in God. But it goes on mentioning their non-prohibition of prohibited things and their deviation from the religion of truth; and it shows that when the verse attributes disbelief to them it really uses a concomitant to allude to the related characteristic. In other words, when they disbelieve in communications of God, it follows that they do not believe even in God and the latter day although they may not realize it. But it does not speak about open and direct disbelief in God.

"While you witness (them)"[1]: It shows that their disbelief in communications refers to their rejection of the Prophet; they did not accept that the Prophet was the promised Prophet whose advent was foretold in the Torah and Injīl although they clearly saw that the signs and descriptions mentioned therein perfectly fitted on the Prophet.

Somebody has said that the word, "communications," is general and

1 *al-Shahādah* (= presence; knowledge through external senses; witness). (Auth.)

comprehensive; it covers all the communications and there is no reason why it should be restricted to the signs of the Prophet; the word therefore refers to their rejection of all the true signs and communications.

Comment: The explanation given by us clearly shows the invalidity of this interpretation.

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

(3:71) ***O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with the falsehood and hide the truth while you know?***

Why do you manifest the truth in the form of falsehood?[1] The words, "while you know," show or at least allude, that the confusion and the hiding refers to their confounding and hiding the religious knowledge and realities; and not to the verses of scriptures; that is, it does not speak about the verses which they had altered, hidden or misinterpreted.

These two verses, beginning with, "O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve …" and ending with, "while you know?," complete the talk which began with the words, "A party of the People of the Book desire …" The whole community has been admonished for the wrong-doings of some of its members, because they were all united in race, tribe and character, and all accepted what some of them were doing. Such usage is commonly found in the Qur'an.

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ آمِنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَجْهَ النَّهَارِ وَاكْفُرُوا آخِرَهُ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(3:72) ***And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe (in) the first part of the day, and disbelieve (at) the end of it, perhaps they go back (on their religion).***

Wajh al-nahār (lit. face of the day) means the first part of the day, because it has been used in contrast with "the end of it"; also the face of a thing is what it appears to others with, and as far as the day is concerned,

1 *al-Labs* means to create doubt; to confuse; to confound. (Auth.)

it is its early part. The context of this saying shows that something was revealed to the Prophet in the early hours of the day which conformed with tenets of the People of the Book, and another revelation came at the end of the day which was against their belief. And this prompted them to say these words.

Therefore, the clause, "that which has been revealed to those who believe," refers to a particular Qur'anic revelation which agreed with the belief and practice of the People of the Book. The words, "the first part of the day ," are an adverbial phrase of time, and it is related not to "Avow belief," but to "has been revealed" because it is nearer. The words, "And disbelieve (at) the end of it," mean: disbelieve in that which has been revealed (to those who believe) at the end of the day; it is an allegorical expression putting the adverbial phrase of time in place of the thing which happened at that time; a similar device has been used in the verse where it says: *Nay,* (it was) *planning of night and day* (34:33).

Accordingly, it supports what has been narrated from the Imams of the *Ahl al-bayt*, relating the circumstances in which this verse was revealed. This idea was propagated by the Jews at the time when the *qiblah* was changed. The Messenger of God had prayed the morning prayer towards Bayt al-Maqdis which was the *qiblah* of the Jews. Then the *qiblah* was changed towards the Kaʿbah in the noon prayer. Then a group of the Jews said: Believe in that which was revealed to those who believe in the early hours of the day, that is, praying towards Bayt al-Maqdis, and disbelieve in that which has been revealed at the end of it, that is, facing towards the Kaʿbah. This explanation is further supported by their assertion which has been quoted in the next verse: "And do not believe but in him who follows your religion;" that is, do not trust anyone who does not follow your religion and does not believe in it, lest you disclose to him some of your secrets and the good tidings which were revealed to you about the promised Prophet—one of the signs foretold of the Prophet was that he would change the *qiblah* towards the Kaʿbah.

Another interpretation: Some exegetes have said that the phrase, "the first part of the day" is related to the verb "Avow belief"; and, "the end of it," is an adverbial phrase, (in which "in" is deleted and understood) and it is related to the verb "disbelieve". Accordingly, the meaning would be as follows: Some of them should pretend to believe in the Qur'an and attach themselves with the Muslims; then they should renounce Islam at the end of the day saying that they had believed in the morning because

they were deceived by apparent signs of truth of Islam but they had to renounce it by the end of the day because they had seen many things which proved its falsity; and because the good tidings of the prophethood and signs of veracity which they were told by the previous prophets did not fit on this Prophet. This was a devious plan to deceive the believers, so that the believers would be overwhelmed by doubts about their religion, and weakened in their conviction; in this way their power would break down and their mission fail.

This meaning in itself is not far-fetched, and especially from the Jews who had left no stone unturned to defeat Islam, to extinguish its light by any possible means. But the wording of the verse does not fit this interpretation. We shall write some related things under the traditions, God willing.

Someone has explained it as follows: Avow belief in their praying towards the Kaʿbah in the first part of the day and disbelieve in it at the end of the day; perhaps they would go back on their religion.

A fourth explanation: Pretend to believe in the first part of the day by agreeing that the signs of the promised prophet were present in the Prophet; and disbelieve at the end of it saying that those attributes did not fit on him; this would put doubts in the believers' minds and perhaps they would renounce their religion. There is no proof for these two interpretations; and whatever the meaning, there is no ambiguity in the verse.

وَلَا تُؤْمِنُوا إِلَّا لِمَنْ تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ الْهُدَىٰ هُدَى اللَّهِ أَنْ يُؤْتَىٰ أَحَدٌ
مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَاجُّوكُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

(3:73) ***And do not believe but in him who follows your religion. Say: Surely the guidance is the guidance of Allah—that one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given; or they would contend with you by an argument before your Lord. Say: Surely grace is in the hand of Allah, He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.***

The context shows that this too is the saying of the People of the Book, completing their talk which started with the words, *Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe.* And likewise the words, *that*

one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given; or they would contend with you by an argument before your Lord, are continuation of their speech. And therefore the sentence, "Say: 'Surely the guidance is the guidance of God,' " is a parenthetical sentence in reply of their talk beginning with, "Avow belief," and ending with, "who follows your religion." The change of style supports this view. Similarly the words, *Say: Surely grace is in the hand of God* are in reply of their talk, *that one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given*. In this way, all the segments of this talk are interwoven and the meanings of the two preceding verses interrelated with one another. Also, the two verses stand face to face with the verses describing the Jews' obstinacy, disputation and deception.

The meaning therefore is as follows, and God knows better:

A party of the People of the Book, that is, the Jews, said one to another: Attest the truth of the Prophet and the believers regarding their prayer towards Bayt al-Maqdis in the first part of the day and do not accept their truth when they prayed towards Kaʿbah in the afternoon. Do not trust others when you talk with them, lest they inform the believers that the changing of *qiblah* to the Kaʿbah was foretold as a sign of the truth of the Promised Prophet. For, if you accepted the affair of the Kaʿbah and disclosed what you knew about it (that it was a sign of the Prophet's truth), then you would have to face two dangers: (1) The believers would get a *qiblah* of their own, like that of yours; it would destroy your supremacy and neutralize your precedence in the matter of *qiblah;* (2) the believers would contend with you before your Lord establishing a proof against you that although you knew about the new *qiblah* and were witnesses of its truth, you did not accept the Islam.

God replied to their talk—that they should believe what was revealed in the early part of the day and disbelieve what happened at the end of it, and their admonition to one another to hide the matter of *qiblah* so that the believers would not know the truth—that the guidance which the believers needed was the true guidance and it was the guidance of God, and not yours. The believers do not need your guidance; you may follow the believers' guidance if you like and reject it if you so desire; you may proclaim the truth if you wish, and hide it if you want.

Then God replies to their fear that one might be given by God the like of what they were given.

He says that *grace is in the hand of God*, He gives it to whom He pleases. It is not in the Jews' hands so that they could reserve it for their

own selves, blocking the way to the others. God has made no comment on their conspiracy to hide the truth so that the believers would be unable to argue with them before their Lord; it was such a conspicuously fallacious presumption that needed no reply. The same disdainful silence is maintained in another verse exposing the same fallacy: *And when they meet those who believe they say: We believe, and when they are alone one with another, they say: Do you talk to them of what Allah has disclosed to you that they may argue with you by this before your Lord? Do you not then understand? What! Do they not know that Allah knows what they conceal and what they proclaim?* (2:76–77). The exclamatory "What!" in the sentence, "What! Do they not know," shows that it is not a reply to the Jews; it is just an indication that their talk goes against correct understanding, for they know that their hiding or proclaiming makes no difference in God's knowledge.

It will be seen from the above explanation that the words, "And do not believe," mean 'do not trust anyone', 'do not expect anyone to keep your secret'. It has the same connotation as the verse: *and believes the believers* (9:61). The words, "him who follows your religion," mean 'the Jews'. Their aim was to prevent the disclosure of what they knew regarding the truth of the change of *qiblah* to the Kaʿbah. Their knowledge of this truth was also referred to in the verses: *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque … and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord; … Those whom we have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons; and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it)* (2:144–146).

The exegetes have written various explanations for these verses. One of them says that the whole verse, ... *And do not believe...Ample-giving, Knowing*, is a direct speech of God, not a quotation of the Jews' talk; and the second person plural pronouns—"And do not believe," "What you were given," "they would contend with you," "before your Lord" are all addressed to the believers; while the second person singular pronoun in "Say" refers to the Prophet. Some others agree with this explanation with one difference: They say that the second person plural pronouns in the above mentioned words are addressed to the Jews, and the speech admonishes and rebukes them. Still others have said that the words, "And do not believe but in him who follows your religion," are the quotation of the Jews' talk; while the words, "Say: 'Surely the guidance is the guidance of God—that one may be given (by Him) …' ," are spoken by God in

reply to what the Jews had said. Likewise, there is a difference about the meaning of "grace" whether it means religion, worldly blessings, dominance or something else.

These interpretations, in spite of their bewildering number, are far removed from the connotation given by the context, as we have already shown. That is why we have not spent much time on them.

Say: Surely grace is in the hand of Allah, He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing: al-Rāghib says:

> Every voluntary gratis benefaction is called *al-faḍl*; as God says: *and ask Allah of His grace* (4:32); *this is Allah's grace* (5:54); *and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace* (2:105); *Say: In the grace of Allah* (10:58); *and were it not for the grace of Allah* (4:83).[1]

Accordingly the sentence, "Say: 'Surely grace is in the hand of God'," is a sort of abbreviated syllogism from which the first premise has been omitted. The full deductive syllogism shall be as follows: Say: This revelation and Divine bestowal (which you are trying to reserve for yourself by pretending to believe and disbelieve and admonishing each other to hide the truth) is not a thing which we mortals can impose on God, it is really a grace. Grace is in the hand of God (to Whom belong the Kingdom and the Command). Therefore, He has the power to give it to whom He pleases. *And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.*

This verse does not leave any room for the Jews to reserve the Divine Grace for themselves (despite their mistaken belief reflected in their words and deeds). Why should some people enjoy the grace of God to the deprivation of others (as the Jews wanted to do with religion and *qiblah*)? One may imagine only three ways for it.

Either the grace of God would fall under the influence of someone else, who then would manipulate the Divine Will, diverting it to one side, preventing it from going in another direction. But the fact is otherwise. Because "Surely grace is in the hand of God, He gives it to whom He pleases."

Or, the bounty is in short supply, is insufficient to reach all the aspirants. In that case it would need some outside factor to choose a few and reject the others. But the fact is otherwise. Because God is Ample-giving; All-powerful, Whose grace knows no limit.

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1 *al-Faḍl* (surplus; that which is in excess). This word is used in commendatory sense, while *al-fuḍūl* is used as a derogatory term. (Auth.)

Or, it could be that the grace—even if it was unlimited and in the hand of God—could not reach a certain group because that group was hidden from God, was unknown to Him. Thus the privileged group plans devious ways to hide the other groups and keep them concealed from God, in order to deprive them of the Divine Grace. But the fact is otherwise. Because God is All-knowing; ignorance cannot reach Him; nothing can be hidden from Him.

يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

(3:74) ***He specially chooses for His mercy whom He pleases; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.***

As the grace is in the hand of God, He gives it to whom He pleases; and as He is Ample-giving, Knowing, it is in His power to choose some of the servants for some of His favors. It is for Him to manage His property as He likes. The fact, that His grace and His bestowal of bounties are unrestricted, or that nobody can put any restraint on Him, does not make it necessary for Him to bestow His grace on each and every person indiscriminately. Otherwise, it would again be a restraint on His absolute power. It is His prerogative to specially choose for His grace whomever He pleases.

The verse ends on the sentence, *And Allah is the Lord of mighty grace*. In a way it explains the reason of all that has been mentioned above. The grace is mighty. Consequently it must be in His hand to give it to whom He pleases. Also, God should be Ample-giving in His grace, knowing the condition of His servants, well aware of which type of grace would be more suitable to a given person. And therefore it should be His prerogative to specially choose for His grace whomever He pleases.

In the sentence, "He specially chooses for His mercy whom He pleases," the word, "grace" has been replaced by "mercy". It shows that the grace, being a free gift, a discretionary bounty, is a branch of mercy. God says: *And My mercy encompasses all things* (7:156); *and were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure* (24:21); *Say: If you control the treasures of the mercy of Lord, then you would withhold (them) from fear of spending* (17:100).

وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنْهُ بِقِنْطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنْهُ

بِدِينَارٍ لَا يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(3:75) ***And among the People of the Book there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you; and among them are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dīnār he shall not pay it back to you except that you remain standing over him, this is because they say: There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach); and they tell a lie against Allah while they know.***

The verse points to the glaring differences seen in the characters of various People of the Book, for example, in keeping the trust and fulfilling the agreements. Their dishonesty and breach of trust is in itself a national disgrace; this characteristic has permeated their society as a well accepted feature. Unfortunately, it is based on their ideology which is reflected in the statement: "There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach)." They called themselves the People of the Book, and called others gentiles, unlearned people. The above quoted statement means that no gentile (non-Israelite) can have any way against an Israelite. Even more disturbing was their claim that the behavior was approved by religion. It is to this aspect that the next sentence refers: "And they tell a lie against God while they know."

They believed—as they do even today that they were the chosen people; Divine Grace was their exclusive property; others had no share in God's favor; God had given them Prophethood, the Book and the Kingdom; therefore they had precedence and excellence over all races, and had a right to subjugate the others. This misconception gave rise to various misunderstandings. For example, they came to believe that the sociological and financial rights and obligations (like prohibition of interest, of devouring others' property and usurping people's rights) were applicable within their own circle only. A Jew should not devour another Jew's property unjustly; an Israelite should not usurp the rights of his own people. In short, only the People of the Book had got a way to reproach against the People of the Book. As for the gentiles, the non-Israelites, they had no way of reproach against the People of the Book. The Jews thought they could deal with non-Israelites anyway they liked; they could do with

others whatever they wanted. In their eyes the gentiles were no better than animals and .they dealt with them as they did with animals.

Of course, the conception was not found in the books that are said to be revealed, like the Torah, etc. They had taken this idea from their rabbis and blindly followed them. Moreover, the religion of Moses was meant for the Children of Israel only; others were neither invited nor allowed to enter it. Thus it became a racial religion. This gave rise to a belief that this excellence and Divine Grace was something based on race for which the Children of Israel were exclusively chosen. Being born of Israel parents was the essence of dignity, the root of excellence, the basis of supremacy. The one who was related to Israel had absolute precedence over all others. When such arrogant spirit governs the structure of a nation, it incites them to create mischief on the earth, and to annihilate the essence of humanity found in a society.

Of course, sometimes it becomes necessary in a human society to deprive some individuals or groups of some common rights. But what should be the criterion for such deprivation? A healthy society believes that whoever tries to negate others' rights or to damage or destroy the society itself, should be deprived of his own rights. From Islamic point of view the only criterion of rights is acceptance of Islam or coming under the protection of Islamic State. One who is neither a Muslim nor a *dhimmī* (one under the protection of Islamic State), has no right in the life. This criterion conforms with the dictate of nature; and you have seen that the human society also recognizes such test in a general way.

Now, we come back to the verse under discussion, "Among the People of the Book." Apparently, it should have been 'Among them'. Why was the noun used in place of the pronoun? It was done to remove a possible misunderstanding: the preceding two verses had spoken about: "A party of the People of the Book"; if these verses had said, 'Among them', it could give an impression that it was speaking about a group of the previously mentioned, "A party of the People of the Book". You will see that after removing this possible cause of misunderstanding, the next verse uses pronoun when it says: "Most surely there is a party amongst those who distort the Book with their tongues."

Also, mentioning of the attribute—that is, their being the People of the Book—points to a sort of reason. That is, such words and deeds—their saying that there is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way to reproach, and their swallowing the people's wealth in this way—would

not have looked so strange if they had been uttered by unlearned people, who did not know anything about prophethood and revelation. But these were the People of the Book; they had the Book which contained the God's Commandments; and they knew very well that the Book did not give them any such latitude, nor did it allow them to take other people's wealth and property just because they were gentiles, non-Israelites. Such statements and deeds were more strange and more disgraceful because they were uttered and done by the People of the Book. Therefore, they deserved more severe condemnation and rebuke.

Apart from their rhetorical beauties,[1] their parallel setting in the context of trustworthiness shows that the words *al-qinṭār* and *al-dīnār*[2] have been used for great and small amounts respectively. The verse means that there are some among them who faithfully keep the amount entrusted to them, no matter how great and valuable it may be; while there are others among them who would embezzle it even if it is a trivial and worthless thing.

The second person singular pronoun in the phrase, "if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you," does not refer to any particular person; it is a sort of indefinite pronoun showing general applicability of the statement. In other words, the sentence means: If someone—anyone—gives him something in trust he shall pay it back to him, no matter how great the amount may be.

...except that you remain standing over him:[3] The word, "standing," points to urgency and insistence; when the claimant remains standing on his feet without sitting, it shows his impatience and inability to wait. Someone has said that *mā* is an adverb of time; but it makes no sense.

...this is because they say: There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach): Apparently, the context shows that the pronoun, "this," refers to the whole description written before, that is, the fact that some of them keep their trust even if it is a huge amount, and others do not pay it back even if it is a small thing; this difference has arisen from their belief that there is on them no way to reproach in

1 Like rhyme and similarity of paradigm. (Trans.)

2 *al-Qinṭār* (figuratively used for huge amounts); *al-dīnār* (a coin). (Auth.)

3 *illā mā dumta ʿalayhi qāʾiman*. It is said that *mā* has changed the verb into *al-maṣdar* (infinitive verb) ; and the sentence means, "except that you remain standing over him". (Auth.)

the matter of the unlearned people. This idea has created among them a great disparity in ethical and spiritual standard although they know that God has not ordained any such thing in His Book, nor is He pleased with such practices of theirs.

Alternatively, it may be referring to the second group only, which is mentioned by the sentence: "And among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a *dīnār* he shall not pay it back to you." In this case, the first (that is, trustworthy) group may have been mentioned here just to give the complete picture, to fulfil the demand of justice. Consequently, the plural pronouns in, "they say," and, "they know," may refer to, "the People of the Book," or to, "some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a *dīnār*". In the latter case, the first person pronoun in, "upon us," may refer to all, "the People of the Book," or to a certain group of them. The translation will differ in each case, but all the possibilities are correct and credible. (Think it over.)

...and they tell a lie against Allah while they know: It refutes their claim that there was not upon them any way to reproach in the matter of the unlearned people. Also, it proves that they used to justify their behavior on religious grounds, claiming that it was a Divine Revelation, as we have mentioned earlier.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(3:76) ***Yea, whoever fulfils his promise and guards (against evil) —then surely Allah loves those who guard (against evil).***

It answers their argument and affirms what they wanted to negate with their statement that there was no way to reproach upon them regarding the non-Israelites. Fulfilment of promise means acting on it and guarding against its breach.[1]

The promise refers to the covenant which God had taken from His servants that they would believe in Him and worship Him. This meaning is supported by the next verse which says: "(as for) those who take a small price for the covenant of God and their (own) oaths." Or, it may mean all promises in general, including the covenant of God.

The sentence, "then surely God loves those who guard (against evil)," is a syllogism from which a premise has been omitted for brevity. Its

1 *al-Tawfiyah* is to give completely; *al-istīfā'* is to take completely. (Auth.)

completed form would be as follows: then surely God loves him, because he guards against evil, and God loves those who guard against evil. The idea is that God bestows honor and dignity on His pious servants by loving them, and not by giving them licence to deceive, exploit and oppress His other servants.

The verse indicates that the divinely bestowed dignity is not so easily obtainable; it is not a common—place thing which could be attained by just verbal expression of belonging, or which may be used for racial or national supremacy by crafty and wily persons. The important condition for attainment of Divine Dignity is piety and fulfilment of the covenant made with God. When these conditions are fulfilled the said dignity is achieved. That dignity means God's love, friendship and guardianship, which are not given except to His pious servants. It results in Divine help and happy life, which in its turn brings them prosperity and betters their condition in this world, and raises their rank in the hereafter.

This is the meaning of dignity which God bestows. It does not give rise to imposition of a certain race or nation on the shoulders of His servants, good and bad alike, giving the supposed "master race" freedom to do whatever they want and to say whatever they like. Thus, one day they would claim, "there is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach);" saying next day that they were the friends of God to the exclusion of the other people;[1] and yet another day, that they were the sons of God and His beloved ones.[2] Thus, it leads them to create mischief in the earth and to destroy the tilth and the stock.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَا خَلَاقَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

(3:77) ***(As for) those who take a small price for the covenant of Allah and their (own) oaths—surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them, nor will He look***

1 *Say: O you who are Jews, if you think that you are the friends of Allah to the exclusion of other people …* (Qur'an, 62:6). (Auth.)

2 *And the Jews and the Christians say: We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones* (Qur'an, 5:18). (Auth.)

upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement.

It explains the reason of the preceding statement. The Divine Dignity is exclusively reserved for those who fulfil the covenant of God and guard against evil—are pious; because the others those who take a small price for the covenant of God and their own oaths—have no honor, no dignity at all.

The fact is that whoever breaks the covenant of God and forsakes piety—not guarding himself against evil—does so just for the enjoyment of the vanities of this world, giving preference to immediate desires over everlasting happiness. He exchanges the covenant of God and the piety with a few worldly trinkets. That is why it has been likened to a trade deal: Covenant of God is the item sold; and insignificant worldly provision, its small price.[1]

Surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them … they shall have a painful chastisement:[2] The descriptions of this group stand face to face with the attributes of the first group (*Yea, whoever fulfils his promise and guards (against evil) …*); and the consequences of their behavior are all negative. Keeping it in view, we find that:

First: The verse points to them with the demonstrative pronoun, *ulā'ika* (those, they), which is used for a distant object. It shows that they are far removed from nearness to God. Conversely, the pious ones who fulfil their covenant are brought nearer to God because He loves them.

Second: When God loves someone, he is given a portion in the hereafter; God will speak to him and look upon him on the Day of Resurrection, will purify him and forgive him, that is, will remove chastisement from him. God has mentioned three traits for those who break the covenant of God and their own oaths.

(1) They shall have no portion in the hereafter because they themselves had preferred this world's share. It shows that "A small price" refers to this world. Of course, we have explained it above as the worldly provision; it was done because God has used adjective "small" for it and the same

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1 *al-Ishtirā'* (is to sell); "they take a small price for the covenant of God and their (own) oaths," that is, they exchange the covenant and oaths for provisions of this world. (Auth.)

2 *al-Khalāq* (portion, share); *al-tazkiyah* (to make grow, good growing; to purify). (Auth.)

adjective has been used for the worldly provision in the verse: *Say. The provision of this world is small* (4:77). In other word, the provision of the world is the world (itself).[1]

(2) God will not speak to them, nor will he look upon them on the Day of Resurrection. It stands *vis-a-vis* the love which God has for His pious servants; in love, the lover wants to enjoy nearness with the beloved, by looking at him and talking to him when they are together. As God does not love this group, He will not speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, the day when they will be brought in His presence. The verse first mentions not speaking and then not looking upon; the description is in descending order; speaking shows more intimacy than looking upon; it is as though the verse wants to say: God shall not confer upon them any honor, neither great nor small.

(3) God will not purify them and they shall have a painful chastisement: The statements are unrestricted and unconditional. It implies that they shall remain unpurified and in chastisement both in this world and in the hereafter.

وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلْوُونَ أَلْسِنَتَهُمْ بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(3:78) ***Most surely there is a party amongst those who distort the Book with their tongue that you may consider it to be (a part) of the Book, and they say, It is from Allah, while it is not from Allah, and they tell a lie against Allah whilst they know.***

al-Layy (= to spin, to entwine); when used with the head or tongue as its object, it means inclining, bending or tilting it. God says: they turn back their heads (63:5); distorting (the word) with their tongues (4:46). Apparently, it means that they recite the lies which they have invented against God in the same tone and style which they use for the Book, in order to confuse the people, making them believe that it was a part of the

1 *al-Ākhirah* (= the hereafter); it stands for *al-dār al-ākhirah* (the abode in the hereafter; the everlasting abode); it is used for life after death. In the same way, *al-dunyā* (the world) stands for *al-dār al-dunyā* (worldly abode), which is used for the life before death. (Auth.)

Book while it is not so.

The word "Book" has been repeated thrice in this sentence, in order to remove all possible ambiguity. The first "Book" refers to that which they wrote with their own hands and attributed to God; the second refers to the "Book" which was revealed by God; the third refers to the same Divine Revelation but the word was repeated to remove ambiguity and to indicate that the "Book," being the Book of God, was too high and sublime to contain such forgeries—it is because the word "Book" has a connotation that points to sublimity.

The same was the cause of repeating the Divine Name, God, in the sentence, "And they say, it is from God, while it is not from God". It means it is not from God Who is the true God and Who does not say except truth, as He Himself says: *and the truth do I speak* (38:84).

The verse ends with the words, "And they tell a lie against God whilst they know": It is refutation after refutation of their ascribing their forgeries to Divine Revelation. They were confusing the people by their distorted recitation; God refuted it and said, "while it is not (a part) of the Book". Then they used to say, "it is from God;" God refuted them first by saying, "while it is not from God"; and then by declaring that "they tell a lie against God". This repeated denial points to two new factors:

(1) Telling lies is their ingrained habit and persistent trait.

(2) It is not because of any confusion or ignorance that they have told such lies; they know that it is a lie and yet they say it.

Examining Narrations

(1) *al-Suyūṭī* writes in *al-Durr al-manthūr* under the verse: *Say: O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you …*: "Ibn Jarīr has narrated through his chains from al-Suddī that he said: 'Then the Messenger of God called them—that is, the delegation of the Christians of Najrān—and said: "O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you …" ' "

Author's comment: The same book quotes another tradition of the same meaning through Ibn Jarīr from Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar b. al-Zubayr. The tradition apparently means that this verse was revealed about the Christians of Najrān. We have written a tradition in the beginning of the chapter[1], that its early part (up to eighty odd verses), was revealed about

1 See *al-Mīzān* (Eng. trans.), vol. 5. (Trans.)

the Christians of Najrān; and this verse is included in that number. Some traditions say that the Messenger of God invited the Jews of Medina to a common word, until they accepted to pay *jizyah*. However, it is not in conflict with its revelation about the delegation of Najrān.

(2) al-Bukhārī narrates through his chains from Ibn ʿAbbās from Abū Sufyān a long hadith in which he, inter alia, mentions the letter sent by the Messenger of God to Heraclius, the Roman emperor. Abū Sufyān says: "Then he (Heraclius) asked for the letter of the Messenger of God and read it; and it was written therein: 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of God to Heraclius, the emperor of Rome. Peace be on him who follows guidance. After this, I invite you to Islam. Accept Islam, and you will be saved (in the hereafter). Accept Islam and God will give you double reward. But if you turn back, then the sin of your people also will be on your shoulders. 'O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you, that we shall not worship any but *Allah* and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides *Allah*'; but if they turn back, then say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones) …' " (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī)

Author's comment: It has also been narrated by Muslim in his *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*; and by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from al-Nasāʾī, ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, all from Ibn ʿAbbās.

And it has been said that also the letter sent by the Messenger of God to Muqawqis, the Chief of the Copts, contained these very words of God, *O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you …*" There is a Cufic writing reputedly the original letter of the Prophet, its text conforming with his letter to Heraclius; and its photos are easily available throughout the Muslims world[1].

However, the historians say that the Messenger of God wrote the letters which he sent through various envoys to many kings and rulers (like: Heraclius, Kisrā and al-Najāshī) in the sixth year of hijrah. It proves that

1 The first such letter discovered was that sent to Muqawqis. Its photo was published in the *al-Hilāl* of November, 1904. It is now in Istanbul (Turkey). A third letter sent to the co-rulers of Oman, ʿAbd and Jayfar, sons of Julandā, was discovered not very long ago. (Trans.)

this verse was revealed in the sixth year or even earlier. On the other hand, the historians (like: al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr and al-Maqrīzī) have written that the delegation of the Christians of Najrān had come to the Messenger of God in the tenth year of hijrah, while others (like: Abu al-Fidāʾ in *al-Bidāyah wa al-nihāyah* and al-Ḥalabī in *al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*) say that it was in the ninth year. If so, then the verse would have been revealed in the ninth of tenth year of hijrah. Sometimes, it is said that it was revealed in the early years of hijrah as the traditions written hereafter will show. Others say that it was revealed twice, as al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar has reported.

Nevertheless, the verses of the chapter are connected with each other in a single context, as we had pointed out in the beginning of the chapter; and it supports the view that the verse was revealed long before the ninth year. Consequently, the delegation must have come in the sixth year of hijrah or even earlier.

It is difficult to believe that the Prophet would write letters to rulers of Rome, Egypt and Fārs and ignore the people of Najrān who were nearer.

There is a point to note in the above quoted tradition. The letter begins with the formula, *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful* . Keeping it in view, we may know the worth of the tradition copied earlier (in the story of Najrān's delegation), from al-Bayhaqī's *Dalāʾilu al-nubuwwah*. He narrates: "The Messenger of God wrote to the people of Najrān, before the (chapter of) 'Ṭā Sīn' (that is, the Ant) was revealed: 'In the name of God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of God to the Bishop of Najrān and the people of Najrān. If you accept Islam, then I extol before you God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. After that I call you to the worship of God leaving aside the worship of the servants (of God), and I invite you to (come under) the guardianship of God instead of the guardianship of the servants. But if you refuse (it), then (you should pay) the head-tax; and if you refuse (even this), then I declare war against you. And peace (be on you).' "

Now, the chapter of the Ant is a Meccan one; and its textual evidence almost clearly proves that it was revealed before hijrah; how can that period be juxtaposed with the event of Najrān? Apart from that, the purported letter contains some other things which cannot be explained, like the demand of *jizyah* and ultimatum of war and other such things. And God knows better.

(3) al-Ṭabarānī narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās: "Verily the letter of the Messenger of God to the unbelievers was: '*come to a word common*

between us and you' (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(4) It is written in the same book about the words of God, *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Abraham,* "Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn Jarīr and al-Bayhaqī (in his *Dalāʾilu al-nubuwwah*) have narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said:

'The Christians of Najrān and rabbis of the Jews came to the Messenger of God and disputed with one another near him. The rabbis said: "Abraham was but a Jew"; and the Christians said: "Abraham was but a Christian". Thereupon, God revealed about them: *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him?… and Allah is the Guardian of the believers.* Then Abū Rāfi al-Quraẓī (a Jew from Banū al-Qurayẓah) said: "Do you demand from us, O Muḥammad! that we should worship you as the Christians worship Jesus son of Mary?" And one of the Najrānites said: "Is it what you wish, O Muḥammad?" And the Messenger of God said: "I seek protection of God that I should worship other than God or enjoin worship of other than Him. Not for this He has sent me or enjoined me." Then God revealed concerning their talk: *It is not meet for a man that Allah should give him the Book and Judgment and Prophethood, then he should say to men: Be my servants rather than Allah's ; but rather (he would say): Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves).*" *Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords; What! would He enjoin you with unbelief after you are Muslims?* (3:79–80). Thereafter God mentioned the covenant He had made with them and their forefathers that they should believe in the Prophet when he came to them, and to their acceptance of this fact; so He said: *And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: Certainly what I have given you of the Book and Wisdom—then an Apostle comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him. He said: Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)*?" *They said: We do affirm. He said: Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you* (3:81). (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: According to the text and context of the verses (*It is not meet for a man that Allah should give him the Book and Judgment and Prophethood …*) are applicable on Jesus son of Mary more meaningfully

and in an easier way than on the Messenger of God, as we shall explain when writing on these verses. Perhaps what the tradition says concerning the revelation of these verses about the Messenger of God is just an inference of Ibn ʿAbbās. Moreover, when the Qur'an deals with such talks, it invariably always brings it in the form of question and answer or as a quotation with its refutation.

(5) al-Kalbī has narrated the story of the hijrah to Abyssinia through Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ʿAbbās; and it has also been narrated by Muḥammad b. Isaac from Ibn Shahāb through his chains, that he said: "When Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib with a group of the Companions of the Prophet migrated to Abyssinia and settled there; and the Prophet migrated to Medina and there happened in Badr what happened, the Quraysh assembled in *Dār al-Nadwah* (the Town Hall) and said to each other: 'You may avenge those who have been killed at Badr with those Companions of Muḥammad who are with al-Najāshī (Negus). Collect some money and send it as a present to al-Najāshī; perhaps he would hand over your tribesmen to you; and there should go two of your wise men as your envoys to him.'

"They sent ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and ʿUmārah b. Abī MuʿAyt[1] with presents (of) skins, etc. They sailed the sea and arrived at Abyssinia. When they came to al-Najāshī, they prostrated before him and greeted him; and said: 'Our people are sincere and thankful to you, and they love your courtiers. They have sent us to you to warn you against these people who have come to you for, they follow an imposter who has stood up, claiming to be a Messenger of God; and none of us has followed him except a few simpletons. And we made life difficult for them and compelled them to take shelter in a narrow mountain valley of our land, with nobody visiting them, until hunger and thirst (nearly) destroyed them. When the situation became too tough for him, he sent his cousin to you, in order to create mischief here—in your religion,

1 The correct name of this person is ʿUmārah b. ʿUqbah b. Abī Muʿayṭ. But the real person who accompanied ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ to Abyssinia, in the first journey, was ʿUmārah b. al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī, the brother of Khālid b. al-Walīd; and in the next journey ʿAmr was accompanied by ʿAbdullāh b. Abī Rabīʿah b. al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī. (Ed.)

kingdom and subjects. Therefore, beware of them and hand them over to us; it will save you the trouble of dealing with them.' Also, they said: And it is a sign (of their mischief) that when they come here they will not prostrate before you, nor will they greet you in the way the people greet you; (it is because of their) disliking your religion and customs.'

"Then al-Najāshī called them (that is, the Muslims). When they came, Jaʿfar called at the door: 'The party of God ask permission to come before you.' al-Najāshī said: 'Tell this caller to repeat his words.' Jaʿfar did, and al-Najāshī said: 'Yes; let them enter with safety of God and His protection.' ʿAmr looked at his colleague and said: 'Do you not hear how they jabbered about the party of God and how the King responded to them?' And they were displeased with it.

"Then (the Muslims) entered and did not prostrate before him. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ said: 'Do you not see that they deem themselves too great to prostrate before you?' al-Najāshī said to them: 'What prevents you from prostrating before me and greeting me in the way all those do who come to me from furthest regions?' They replied: 'We do *sajdah* (prostration) to God Who created you and gave (this) kingdom to you. Of course, we were using the customary greeting when we were idolaters; then God raised among us a truthful Prophet, and he taught us the greeting which God is pleased with, and that is, "Peace," the greeting of the people of the Garden.' al-Najāshī knew that it was true and that it was in the Torah and Injīl. Then he said: 'Who among you had called, "The party of God asks permission to come before you?" ' Jaʿfar said: 'I' Then he (Jaʿfar) said: 'You are a king from the People of the Book, and it is not proper to talk much before you, nor to do any injustice. I would like to answer on behalf of my Companions; therefore, order these two people that one of them should speak and the other should just listen; and you should listen to our talk.' ʿAmr said to Jaʿfar: 'Speak.' Jaʿfar said to al-Najāshī: 'Ask these two people whether we are slaves or free people. If we are slaves (and) have fled from our masters, then you should return us to them.' an-Najāshī said: Are they slaves or free people?' He (ʿAmr) said: 'Nay; (they are) free and noble people.' al-Najāshī said: 'They are saved from slavery.' Jaʿfar said: 'Ask them if we have shed any

blood unjustly, so that they want its requital from us?' ʿAmr said: 'No; not a single drop.' Jaʿfar said: Ask them, if we have taken other people's property without right, so that we have to repay it?' al-Najāshī said: 'Even if it is a heap of money I shall repay it.' ʿAmr said: 'No; not even a small amount.' al-Najāshī said: 'Then what do you want from them?' (ʿAmr) said: 'We and they were together on one religion, the religion of our forefathers; and they have left it and followed another religion. Therefore, our people have sent us so that you may hand them over to us.' al-Najāshī said: 'What was the religion you followed and what is that which they have now accepted?' Jaʿfar said: As for the religion we followed before, it was the religion of the Satan; we disbelieved in God and worshipped the stone. And as for the religion to which we have turned, it is the religion of God, the Islam; it has been brought to us from God by a Messenger, coming with a Book like the Book of the son of Mary and conforming to it.' al-Najāshī said: 'O Jaʿfar! you have spoken a very great thing.'

"Then al-Najāshī ordered the gong to be rung. It was done and every priest and monk gathered near him. When all were assembled, al-Najāshī said: 'I adjure you by God Who revealed the Injīl to Jesus, do you find (any news of) a prophet messenger between Jesus and the Day of Resurrection?' They said: 'By God! Yes. He has given us the good news of him and said: "Whoever shall believe in him shall believe in me, and whoever shall disbelieve in him shall disbelieve in me." ' al-Najāshī said to Jaʿfar: 'What does this man say to you? What does he enjoin you to do? And what does he forbid you from?' (Jaʿfar) said: 'He recites to us the Book of God and enjoins us to do good and forbids us the evil; he enjoins us to be good to our neighbors and relatives and to the orphans, (and) tells us that we should worship God, the One, (Who) has no partner.' (al-Najāshī) said to him: 'Recite to me from what he recites to you.' Then (Jaʿfar) recited to him the Chapters of 'The Spider' and 'The Romans'. The eyes of al-Najāshī and his Companions overflowed with tears, and they said: 'Recite to us some more from this good talk.' Then Jaʿfar recited to them the Chapter of 'The Cave'. (At this stage) ʿAmr, intending to incite (the anger of) al-Najāshī against them, said: 'These people abuse Jesus and his mother.' al-Najāshī said (to Jaʿfar): 'Well, what do

you say about Jesus and his mother?' Then he (Jaʿfar) recited the Chapter of 'Mary'. When he came to the story of Mary and Jesus, al-Najāshī raised his tooth-stick just a small bit (enough to disturb one's eyes) and said: 'By God! The Messiah did not say more then what you have said.' Then he said turning towards Jaʿfar and his Companions: 'Go, you are free in my land; you are safe from ill-treatment, and it will be a crime to give you any trouble.' Again, he said: 'Be of good cheer; do not be afraid; there is no downfall today for the party of Abraham.' ʿAmr said: 'O al-Najāshī! and who are the party of Abraham?' (al-Najāshī) said: 'This group and their companion (that is, the Prophet) whence they have come here, and those who follow them.' The polytheists denied it and claimed (themselves to be on) the religion of Abraham. Then al-Najāshī gave back to ʿAmr and his companion the presents they had brought (to him), and said: 'Surely your present is just a bribe; you take it back because God gave this kingdom to me and He did not take any bribe from me.' Jaʿfar said: 'Then we returned (from the court), and we were under the best protection.' And God revealed to the Messenger (who was in Medina) the verse about their dispute about Abraham: *Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this prophet and those who believe; and Allah is the Guardian of the believers.* (*al-Tafsīr,* al-Khāzin)

Author's comment: This story has been narrated with other chains, and also from the *Ahl al-bayt*. We have copied it here in spite of its length, and although it has nothing to do with the circumstances in which the verses under discussion were revealed, because it contains important information about the trials of the first migrants among the Muslims.

(6) It has been narrated from al-Ṣādiq about the words of God, *Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian*, that he said: "The Leader of the Faithful, said: 'Neither a Jew praying to the West nor a Christian praying to the East; but he was an upright Muslim on the religion of Muḥammad.' " (*al-Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: We have explained in the Commentary the meaning of his being on the religion of Muḥammad, blessing of God be on them and their progenies! This tradition looks at the direction of prayer when the *qiblah* was changed to the Kaʿbah (and the Kaʿbah is almost to the south of Medina). The Jews and the Christians denied its validity; and

felt themselves obliged to turn towards the west (where Bayt al-Maqdis is situated), or the east (to which the Christian face). This has been counted as a deviation of these two groups from the middle course. This aspect is supported by wordings of the verse: *And thus We have made you a medium nation* (2:143). However, it is just an interesting and fine literary inference, and nothing more.

(7) Explaining this verse, al-Sādiq said: "Pure, sincere, totally free from idol-worship." (*al-Kāfī*)

(8) The Leader of the Faithful said explaining the verse: *Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed …*: "Surely the nearest of the people to the prophets is he who practices most faithfully what they have brought." Then he recited this verse and said: "Surely the friend of Muḥammad is he who obeys God, even if his relationship is far from him; and surely the enemy of Muḥammad is he who disobeys God, even if he has a near relationship with him." (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*)

(9) al-Ṣādiq said: "They are the Imams and their followers." (*al-Kāfī*; *al-Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī)

(10) ʿUmar b. Udhaynah narrates from the same Imam that he said: "You, by God, are from the progeny of Muḥammad." I said: "From themselves? May I be your ransom!" He said: "Yes, by God, from their own selves." He said it three times; then he looked at me and I looked at him and he said: "O ʿUmar! surely God says in His Book: *Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham …* (*al-Tafsīr,* al-Qummī; *al-Tafsīr,* al-ʿAyyāshī)

(11) There is a tradition narrated from al-Bāqir that he said about this verse: *And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief:* "Verily, when the Messenger of God came to Medina he was praying towards Bayt al-Maqdis, (and) the people (that is, the Jews) were pleased with it. When God turned him from Bayt al-Maqdis towards His Sacred House, the Jews were annoyed. And the change of *qiblah* had happened in the noon prayer. So they said: 'Muḥammad prayed the morning prayer facing towards our *qiblah*; therefore, believe in that which was revealed to Muḥammad in the first part of the day; and disbelieve the latter part'; they meant (disbelieve in) the *qiblah* when the Messenger of God faced towards the Sacred Mosque." (*at-Tafsīr,* al-Qummī)

Author's comment: As you see, the tradition takes the adverbial

phrase, (in) *the first part of the day,* as related to the verb, *was revealed;* and not to the verb, *Avow belief.* And we have explained it in the Commentary.

(12) Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated through al-ʿAwfī from Ibn ʿAbbās, that he said about the verse: *And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief …:* "A party of the Jews said: 'Avow belief when you meet the Companions of Muḥammad in the first part of the day; and when it is the end of it then pray (according to) your own prayer; perhaps they, that is, the believers, would say: 'These are the People of the Book and they are more knowledgeable than us." Perhaps they would then turn away from their religion.' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: This meaning has been narrated in the same book from al-Suddī and Mujāhid also.

(13) al-Bāqir said about the verse 2:27: "It has been revealed about the covenant: *(As for) those who take a small price for the covenant of Allah and their own oaths—surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them, nor will He look upon them on the Day of Resurrection nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement.* And 'portion' means share. So he who shall have no share in the hereafter, with what will he enter the Garden?" (*al-Kāfī*)

(14) al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī narrates through his chains from ʿAdiyy b. ʿAdiyy from his father that he said: "Imraʾ al-Qays and a man from Ḥaḍramawt brought their dispute concerning a land to the Messenger of God. (The Prophet) said: 'Do you have a proof?' He said: 'No.' (The Prophet) said: 'Then (it will be decided) by his (that is, the opposite party's) oath.' He said: 'Then, by God, he will take away my land.' (The Prophet) said: 'If he takes your land by his (false) oath, he shall be among those that God will not look upon him on the Day of Resurrection nor will He purify him and he shall have a painful chastisement.' (Hearing this) the man was frightened and gave the land back to him." (*al-Amālī,* al-Shaykh)

Author's comment: As you see, the tradition does not show that the verse was revealed about this event. Several traditions have been narrated through the Sunnī chains that it was revealed about this event. But those traditions give conflicting reports. Some like the above, say, that the dispute was between Imraʾ al-Qays and a man from Ḥaḍramawt; others say that the conflict was between al-Ashʿath b. al-Qays and a Jew concerning

a land; yet, another tradition says that it was revealed about an unbeliever, who had offered in the market a merchandise for sale, and in order to deceive a Muslim customer, swore by God that he was offered for it a price which in reality he was not offered. Then the verse was revealed.

You have seen in the Commentary that obviously the verse explains the reason of the preceding verse. In this background utmost that is possible is to take these traditions as an application of the verse on that happening ; but they cannot be accepted as an account of the circumstances in which the verse was revealed.

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Verses 79-80

The verses come after those related to the affairs of Jesus; it implies that it is the second stage of the argument exonerating Jesus from the responsibility of what the Christians believe about him. We may summarize the whole argument as follows:

Jesus was not as you think about him. Neither was he Lord nor had he claimed Lordship for himself. (1) He was not Lord, because he was a mortal creature; was conceived in his mother's womb who gave birth to him and brought him up in a cradle. Of course, just like Adam, he had no father, thus his likeness was with God as the likeness of Adam. (2) Nor had he claimed to be Lord, because he was a prophet, and was given the Book, the Judgment and Prophethood; and a prophet, having that status, cannot transgress the limit of servitude, nor can he divest himself of submission to God.

How can a prophet tell people: Take me as your Lord, be my servants rather than God's? Or, how can he allow it for any other creature of God? A prophet would never enjoin men to take the angels or the prophets for lords. He would not give to any servant of God more than his due, nor would he deny prophethood of any prophet of God divesting him of his status and dignity.

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَٰكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(3:79) ***It is not meet for a man*** **(li basharin)** ***that Allah should give him the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood, then he should say to men: Be my servants rather than Allah's; but rather (he would say): Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves):***

Li in *li-basharin*[1] denotes ownership; that is, it does not belong to

1 *al-Bashar* (= man) is synonymous with *"al-insān"*; it is used for singular as well

him; it is not meet for him; he has no right to it. The same expression has been used in some other places; for example, *It does not beseem us that we should talk of it* (24:16); *And it is not attributable to a prophet that he should act unfaithfully* (3:161).

The clause, "that God should give him the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood," is the subject of *kāna* (= was; is). It prepares the ground for the next statement; "then he should say to men; 'Be my servants rather than God's.' " Apparently, the sentence could be shortened by omitting the introductory clause, "that God should give him the Book …"; yet, it was inserted to give a new connotation to the phrase, "It is not meet for a man". Let us see what happens if the sentence is rewritten, omitting the introductory clause; then the verse would run as follows: It is not meet for a man that he should say to men. The meaning then would be as follows: He was not given that right, although possibly he could say so if he transgressed the limit and became insolent. But there is no room for such inference in the sentence as it now stands. The verse in the present form means as follows: When God gives a man knowledge and gnosis of reality, and brings him up with Divine Care, that man can never transgress the boundary of servitude; nor does he feel free to interfere in what does not belong to him, or to dispose what he has no right to; as God describes the declaration of Jesus, in the verse: *And when Allah will say: O Jesus son of Mary! did you say to men, 'take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah' , he will say: Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say)* (5:116).

The verse says, "that God should give him ," instead of saying: a man whom God gave the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood. The reason for it is clear from the above explanation. The latter wording points only to the basic legislative prohibition of such transgression. On the other hand, the present construction, "that God should give him ...," shows that such behavior is definitely impossible. The Divine Guidance and upbringing cannot fail to attain its goal, as God says: *These are they whom We gave the Book and the Judgment and the Prophethood, therefore if these* (the tribesmen of the Messenger of God,) *disbelieve in it, We have (already) entrusted with it a people who are not disbelievers in it* (6:89).

In short, the verse says that it is not possible for a man to join these Divine Favors with calling the men to his own worship. It is not possible

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as plural; one man is *al-bashar* and also a group of men is *al-bashar*. (Auth.)

when he is given a Book, the Judgment and Prophethood that he should say to men: Be my servants rather than God's. In this context the verse resembles to a certain extent the verses: *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allah, nor do the angels who are near to Him and as for those who disdain and are proud, He will chastise them with a painful chastisement. And they shall not find for themselves besides Allah a guardian or a helper* (4:172–173). The implication is that the Messiah and the angels who are near to God are too high in prestige and too great in status to disdain the worship of God; because disdaining His worship brings painful chastisement on the culprit; and far be it from God to chastise His honored prophets or the near angels.

Objection: The verse uses the word, *thumma* (then) in the phrase, "then he should say to men"; this conjunctive denotes some delay; and the delay does not conform with the joining you have mentioned.

Reply: What we have said about joining the Divine Favors with calling men to disbelief gives the gist of the matter. Togetherness and combination can happen with simultaneous things as well as with two things appearing consecutively—that too is a sort of combination.

Be my servants rather than God's:[1] The proviso, "rather than God's," has been added after the words, "my servants," as a matter of necessity. God does not accept any worship unless it is purely for His own person. God says: *Now, surely, sincere religion* (obedience) *is for Allah* (alone); *and* (as for) *those who take guardians besides Him,* (saying), *We do not worship them save that they may make us nearer to Allah , surely Allah will judge between them in that in which they differ; surely Allah does not guide him aright who is a liar, ungrateful* (39:3). Thus, God has rejected outright the worship of those who join worship of others with His worship, even if the others are worshipped merely as intercederes and intermediaries, and only with intention of reaching near God through them.

Moreover, the reality of worship does not come into existence until some independence is admitted for the worshipped even in polytheism. The partner, *per se,* has some independence; while in reality it is only to

1 *al-ʿIbād* like *al-ʿAbīd* is plural of *al-ʿAbd* (= slave; servant); the difference between the two plurals is in usage; *al-ʿibād* is mostly used in relation to God, for example, *ʿibād allāh* (= slaves/servants of God); while *al-ʿAbīd* is generally used when related to man; they say, *ʿAbīd al-nās* (= slaves/servants of men), and not *ʿibād al-nās*. (Auth.)

God that absolute Lordship and Godhead belongs. Therefore, His Lordship cannot be complete, nor can His worship be correct except with negation of independence from every other thing in every possible way. The worship of someone else is worship of other than God, even if God is worshipped with him.

...but rather (he would say): Be worshippers of the Lord **(al-Rabbānī)** ***because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves)***[1]**:**

al-Dirāsah (to study) is more specific than *al-Taʿallum* (to learn; to study), as the former is generally used for studying from book by reading and reciting. al-Rāghib says:

> *Daras al-dār* (vestiges of the house remained); it implies that the house itself was obliterated; and for this reason *al-durūs* is translated as obliteration. Likewise, *daras al-kitāb* (or, *daras al-ʿilm*) means, he got trace of book (or, knowledge) memorizing it; he grasped its meaning. As it is attained by regular recitation, such recitation is called memorization. God says: *and they have read what is in it* (7:169); *because of your teaching the Book and reading; And We have not given them any books which they read* (44:44)."

The theme is that a man having such a high status will call you only to attainment of faith and to believe in the teachings of the Book which you learn and teach—the Book that contains the fundamental Divine Knowledge; he will enjoin you to acquire noble character and good traits found in the Book; and to practise and do good deeds to which you call the people. He will do so, in order that you attach yourselves exclusively to your Lord, and thus become divine scholars.

Bi-mā kuntum (lit., because you were), being a past tense, shows that the action had already taken place; that the audience was already teaching and reading the Book. It gives a hint that, possibly, it is an allusion to the Christians, who said that Jesus had told them that he was the son of

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1 *al-Rabbānī* (translated here as worshippers of the Lord) is derived from *al-Rabb* (the Lord), to which 'A' and 'n' have been added for augmentation of meaning; as for example, they use: *al-liḥyānī* for one having a luxuriant beard. Thus *al-Rabbānī* means the one having special relationship with the Lord, and spending his life in His servitude and worship. *Bi* in *bi-mā* is causative, and means "because"; while *mā* is for *al-maṣdar* and has changed the past tenses into infinitive verbs; that is why we have translated it in the following way: *but rather (he would say): 'Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves)'* (Auth.)

God and His Word (with all the differences in the meaning of sonship). The fact is that the Children of Israel had been given a revealed Book which they taught and read; then they differed in it—a difference that was accompanied by textual changes and alterations. Jesus was sent only to explain to them a part of what they differed in and to allow them part of that which was forbidden them; in short, to call them to fulfil their obligations concerning the learning and teaching—that they should attach themselves exclusively to their Lord in reading and teaching His Book.

Although the verse may somehow be applied to the Messenger of God—because his mission covered the People of the Book too, who used to teach and read the Book of God—but Jesus was before the Prophet and the verse applies to him in a more befitting manner; also because he was sent exclusively to the Children of Israel, unlike the Messenger of God.

So far as other *ulu al-ʿAzm* prophets (who came with a Book), that is, Noah, Abraham and Moses are concerned, the verse obviously cannot be applied to them.

وَلَا يَأْمُرَكُمْ أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ أَرْبَابًا ۗ أَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(3:80) *Or that he should enjoin you* (yaʾmurakum)[1] *that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords; what! would he enjoin you with unbelief after you are Muslims (Submitting Ones)?*

A group of the People of the Book had taken the angels for lords. For instance, the Sabaeans worshipped the angels and attributed that custom to the authority of religion. Likewise the Arabs, while claiming to follow the religion of Abraham, said that the angels were God's daughters.

As for taking the prophets for lords, the Jews, for instance, said that ʿUzayr was the son of God—as the Qur'an quotes them—although Moses had not allowed it to them, nor was there in the Torah anything other than monotheism. Had Moses allowed it to them he would be enjoining it—far be it from him!

The style of the verse, "then he should say to men: 'Be my servants

1 The verb *yaʾmurakum* (= or that he should enjoin you), because of the vowel *A* after *yaʾmur* (according to the well-known and common recital), is in conjunction with "he should say". (Auth.)

rather than God's' ," differs in two ways from that of the next verse, "Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords": (1) The subject matter in the former is worship of other than God, and in the latter it is taking them for lords. (2) The people enjoined in the former are described in third person, "men," while the latter addresses them directly in second person. Let us look at both changes:

First: The former verse adversely alludes to the Christians concerning their worship of Jesus. As is known, they believe in his godhead openly, saying that he had invited them to his own worship. Thus they have clearly ascribed this call to Jesus that he said to them: 'Be my servants'. On the other hand, taking the angels and the prophets for lords (in the meaning used in the case of others than Jesus) is opposed to the belief of monotheism only by implication, not clearly. That is why the latter verse uses the word, "lords," instead of gods.

Second: Both expressions (*Be my servants; that he should enjoin you*) deal with a subject which was relevant to the audience of these verses, that is, the People of the Book and the Arabs. The first verse has used the word, "should say"; and "saying" implies a face to face talk. But the people present at the time of the Prophet were not present at the material time, that is, when Jesus was supposed to say it. It is for this reason that the verse says, "he should say to men," instead of saying, he should say to you. On the other hand, the second verse uses the word "enjoin"; enjoining does not necessarily require face to face talk; it may be done even when the enjoined one is absent. An order given to, or a matter connected with, the ancestors is applied to the later generations if the latter identify themselves with the former. As for "saying"—because it employs transmission of voice—it denotes oral conversation and presence of the audience (except when it is used simply in the meaning of instruction).

It is therefore evident that basically these verses require second person plurals (as in, *or that he should enjoin you)*; but exception was made in the first verse owing to special reasons.

What! would he enjoin you with unbelief after you are Muslims (Submitting Ones)? Apparently, the question is directed to all who followed a prophet like the People of the Book, or claimed to do so like the Arabs of the days of Ignorance who believed that they were on the religion of Abraham. The talk is based on a hypothetical proposition and the meaning is as follows: If it is true that you do follow this man who was given the Book, the Judgment and Prophethood, then you have already

submitted to God, acquiring the characteristics of Islam; then how will it be possible for that prophet to enjoin you with disbelief, diverting you from the very path to which he had guided you by the order of God?

It is clear from the above explanation that in this verse, Islam refers to the religion of monotheism; the religion which God sent all the prophets with. This view is supported by other verses preceding and following this verse, in which the word, "Islam," has been used in this very meaning: *Surely the religion with Allah is Islam* (3:19); *Is it then other than Allah's religion that they seek* (to follow) … *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers* (3:83–85).

An exegete has said:

> The two verses under discussion refer to the Messenger of God. His view is based on a tradition (quoted earlier) describing the circumstances of its revelation which says that Abū Rāfiʿ al-Quraẓī and a Najrānite Christian said to the Messenger of God: "Do you want us to worship you? O Muḥammad!" Then God revealed: *It is not meet for a man that God should give him … after you are Muslims?*

Then the said exegete has argued by the last phrase, *After you are Muslims*; "because Islam is the religion brought by Muḥammad."

Comment: He has confused the Islam of Qur'anic terminology (the religion of monotheism which was preached by all the prophets) with the Islam of the Muslims' terminology—a term which came into use after the time of revelation. (We have explained it earlier).

Conclusion (Having Seven Sections)

The Story of Jesus and his Mother in the Qur'an

Mary, daughter of ʿImrān, was the mother of the Messiah. When her mother was pregnant with her, she made a vow that she would release what was in her womb to be devoted to the service of the Temple. She believed that she was pregnant with a male child; but when she brought it forth and came to know that it was a female, she was disappointed and dejected. Then she named her Mary, that is, servant. Her father, ʿImrān, had died before she was born; so the mother brought her to the Temple for handing her over to the priests—Zachariah was one of them.

They contended one with another to get the privilege of her custody;

then they agreed to decide it by lot, in which Zachariah's name was drawn; and he became her guardian. When she reached the age of puberty, Zachariah made for her a partition to protect her from men's eyes. She used to worship God therein and nobody entered that sanctuary except Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered the sanctuary to see her, he found with her food. He said: "O Mary! whence comes this to you?" She said: "It is from God, and surely God gives sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure."

Mary was a truthful woman, and was sinless by God's protection; purified, chosen and spoken to; the angels spoke to her and purified her. She was obedient to the Lord and a sign of God for the worlds. (As per, 3:35–44; 19:16; 21:91; 66:12.)

Then God sent to her His Spirit when she had hidden herself behind a curtain, and he appeared to her as a well-made man. He said to her that he was a messenger of her Lord so that he should give her, by permission of God, a pure boy without a father. He also gave her good news of the manifest miracles which were to happen on the hand of her son; and informed her that God would surely strengthen him by the Holy Spirit, and would teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah and the Injīl. He also told her that her son would be a messenger to the Children of Israel and would have clear signs. After informing her of the boy's status and story, he breathed into her the Spirit and she became pregnant with Jesus, as a woman conceives her child. (As per 3:33–50.)

Then she withdrew herself with him to a remote place. And the throes of childbirth compelled her to betake herself to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said: "Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!" Then (the child) called out to her from beneath her: "Grieve not; surely your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you: And shake towards you the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates: So eat and drink and refresh the eye. Then if you see any man, say: 'Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent God, so I shall not speak to any man today.' " And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her), as per 19:20–27. His conception, birth, talk and all related affairs were similar to those of other men.

When her people saw her in such a condition, they were enraged, and blamed and taunted her—as was natural in case of an unmarried woman conceiving and bringing forth a child. They said: "O Mary, surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron! your father was not a bad

man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman." But she pointed to him. They said: "How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "Surely I am a servant of God; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: And he has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and *zakāt* so long as I live: And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblessed: And peace on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life." (As per 19:27–33.)

This talk of Jesus was a sort of prologue which pointed to his future mission—that he would rise against oppression and injustice, revive and reform the shariah of Moses, renovate what was obliterated from the revealed knowledge and make clear to them what they had differed in.

Jesus grew up and became a young man. He and his mother used to eat and drink in normal way with all the necessary concomitants and accidents of human life up to the end.

Then Jesus was made a messenger to the Children of Israel. He stood up calling them to the religion of monotheism and told them: "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird, with God's permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life, with God's permission, and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses. Most surely there is a sign in this for you. Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, therefore, worship Him only."

He called them to his new shariah, which verified the Law of Moses; but he abrogated some parts of it, allowing them something which were forbidden in the Torah as a punishment to the Jews. Jesus used to say: "Surely I have come to you with wisdom, so that I may make clear to you a part of what you differ in. O Children of Israel! surely I am the messenger of God to you, verifying that which is before me of the Torah and giving the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, his name being Aḥmad."

He showed the miracles which he had mentioned, example—creation of bird, raising the dead to life, healing the blind and leper, and giving the news of the unseen—all by God's permission.

He continued like that calling them to monotheism and his new shariah until he was convinced that they would not believe in him. Seeing their insolence, enmity and hatred, and the arrogance of their priests and rabbis, he turned away from them and selected his apostles (from the small

band that had believed in him) to be his helpers to God.

Then the Jews rose against him with the intention to kill him. But God took him away completely and raised him. The Jews were put in confusion: some thought that they had killed him, others that they had crucified him; but in fact it was made to appear to them like that. (As per 3:45–58; 4:157–158; 5:110–111; 43:63–65; 61:6–14.)

This is in short the story of Jesus (son of Mary) and his mother as given in the Qur'an.

Position of Jesus Before God and in His Sight

Jesus was a servant of God and a prophet (vide 19:30); a messenger to the Children of Israel (vide 3:49); was one of the five *ulu al-ʿAzm* prophets, bringing a new shariah and a Book, that is, Injīl (vide 5:46; 33:7; 42:13); God named him the Messiah, Jesus (vide 3:45); he was the Word of God and a Spirit from Him (vide 4:171); an Imam (vide 33:7); one of the witnesses of deeds (vide 4:159; 5:117); he brought the good news of the Messenger of God (vide 61:6); was worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter, and one of those who are made near to God (vide 3:45); was one of the chosen progenies (vide 3:33); one of the selected and righteous ones (vide 6:85–87); was made blessed wherever he might be, and purified; was a sign to the people, a mercy from God, and dutiful to his mother; greeted himself with peace (vide 19:19–33); and was among those whom God taught the Book and the Wisdom (vide 3:48).

These twenty-two characteristics, from the stations of *al-wilāyah* (friendship and guardianship of God), give the gist of the attributes which God has used to praise this honored prophet and to raise his rank. These may be divided in two categories: (1) The acquired ones, like servitude, righteousness and nearness to God; (2) Those bestowed by God as His special grace. We have explained each characteristic in relevant places of this book according to our understanding. Anyone, wanting more details should look it up in those volumes.

What Jesus Said, and What was Said About Him?

The Qur'an says that Jesus was God's servant and messenger; and that he did not claim for himself what the Christians ascribe to him, nor did he tell them anything other than conveying the Divine Message. God says: *And when Allah will say: O Jesus son of Mary! did you say to men, 'Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah' , he will say: Glory be to*

Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Thy mind; surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen things. I did not say to them aught save what Thou didst enjoin me with: That worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord, and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things. If Thou shouldst chastise them, then surely they are Thy servants; and if Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise. Allah will say: This is the day when their truth shall benefit the truthful ones (5:116–119).

This wonderful reply contains the essence of servitude and shows outstanding manner; it is a mirror of Jesus' attitude and behavior towards his Lord; it shows how he looked at himself in relation to his Creator and what he thought of the people and their deeds. He says that he looked at himself just as a servant of his Lord, who had nothing to do other than obeying the Lord; he does not proceed except when directed to, and does not stop unless told to. And he was not ordered except to call people to the worship of God and he did not tell them except what he was enjoined with: *That worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.*

And so far as his relationship with his people is concerned he shall be the witness for their deeds, and that is that; it is none of his business what God does with them and about them—whether He forgives them or chastises them.

Question: If so, then how would you justify what you had written in the topic of intercession that Jesus shall be among the intercessors on the Day of Resurrection, he shall intercede and his intercession will be honored and accepted?

Answer: The Qur'an says expressly—or almost expressly—that he is an intercessor. God says: *And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know* (43:86); *and on the Day of Resurrection he* (Jesus) *shall be a witness against them* (4:159); *and when I taught you the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl* (5:110). And we have already written extensively on the subject of intercession.

This intercession is something quite different from the atonement which the Christians believe in. The theory of atonement invalidates the system of reward and punishment, and consequently negates the absolute

sovereignty of God—as we shall explain later on. It is the idea of atonement which the above-mentioned talk of Jesus refutes. But this verse has nothing to do with intercession—it neither confirms it nor rejects it. Had it wanted to confirm it—in spite of its inconsistency[1] with context—it should have said: If Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Forgiving, the Merciful. And if it wanted to refute it, it should not have mentioned his being a witness for the people. We shall describe in detail this topic later on, God willing.

Looking at what the people said about Jesus, we find that they were divided after him into various sects, and disintegrated to perhaps more than seventy denominations. This number looks at fundamental and major divisions only, because minor differences are too numerous to count.

Nevertheless, the Qur'an concerns itself only with what they say about Jesus and his mother, because it affects the foundation of monotheism which is the only goal to which the Qur'an calls and the natural straight religion leads. The Book of God is not concerned with other relatively minor points, example, the problem of alteration of the Book and that of atonement.

The beliefs which the Qur'an ascribes to them (or quotes them) are as follows:

and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah (9:30); *And they say: The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son* (21:26);

Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah, is the Messiah, son of Mary (5:72);

Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah is the third of the three (5:73);

and say not, Three (4:171).

Apparently these verses contain different phrases, describe different beliefs. (That is why some people[2] apply various verses to various sects,

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1 Because the situation demands self-abasement, not relaxedness. (Auth.)

2 Like al-Shahristāni in his *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*. (Auth.)
The author has taken these descriptions from al-Shahristāni (vide *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* (Egypt, 1381 A.H. = 1961 C.E.) vol. 1, pp. 220–228). But ash-Shahristāni's information is superfluous and apparently based on hear-say; and his comments on Christianity remind one of his flight of fancy regarding Shīʿite faith and its various imaginary branches. The fact is that almost all the splits in the early Christian Church were centred around the nature and substance of the Christ. It is not the place to go into historical details. Suffice

for example, the Melkites[1] who believe in real sonship; the Nestorians[2] who explain descendence and sonship as radiance of light on a transparent body like crystal; and the Jacobites[3] who explain it in the terms of

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it to say that gradually four groups had come into being about the nature of Jesus Christ:
(a) Homoousians who believe that the Son was of one substance with the Father; they are called the Orthodox;
(b) Homoeans who believed that the Son was like the Father; they are called the Arians;
(c) Homoiousians who believed that the Son was of like substance with the Father; they are called the Semi-Arians;
(d) Anomoeans who believed that the Son was unlike the Father; they are called Ultra-Arians.
Ultimately the Orthodox (Homoousians) prevailed. They say that the Son was of one substance with the Father, and that the Incarnate Christ was a single Person of a doubt nature—Divine and human—at one God and man. All the sects are united on the "sonship," although they differ in its interpretation. That is why the Qur'an rejects sonship—and the resulting trinity. (Trans.)

1 Melkites (or Melchites) were those Christians of Syria and Egypt who, refusing the doctrine of Monophysitism (for its meaning see note no.2 p.152), and accepting the definition of faith of the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.), remained in communion with the Imperial See of Constantinople; hence their name that means "Emperor's men". (al-Shahristāni thinks that Malka was some individual who started this sect!) They like other Orthodox Christains, believe that the Logo (Word) of God being conjoined with the man Jesus—together called the Christ—was begotten in a non-literal sense by God. They do not believe in physical human-like sonship. Today there are about a million Melkites, most of them belonging to the Patriarchate of Antioch, whose headquarters are at Damascus. (Trans.)

2 Nestorians: Followers of Nestorius (cir. 380–451 C.E.), who was the Patriarch of Constantinople (428–431 C.E.). He believed that there were two separate Persons in the Incarnate Christ—that the physical nature of Jesus was separate from his divine one, as opposed to the orthodox doctrine. According to him, it was Jesus the man, who was born of the Virgin Mary. Consequently, he rejected the term, Theotokos, (lit., God-bearer; usually translated as "Mother of God"), that was used to refer to Mary. For this heresy he was anathematized by the Council of Ephesus (431 C.F.). (al-Shahristāni says that Nestorius lived during the reign of al-Ma'mūn—813–833 C.E.!) (Trans.)

3 Jacobites: The body of the Syrian Monophysites who rejected the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) on the Person of the Christ. Monophysitism was the doctrine that in the Person of the Incarnate Christ

change and transformation, that is, the God was transformed into flesh and blood.)

But evidently the Qur'an does not look at the peculiarities of their diverse sects. It is concerned only with one belief which is common between all of them—that Jesus is the son of God and of one substance with God, with the resulting belief of trinity—although they differ very much in its explanation (which has led to extreme conflicts and discords). That this explanation is correct is supported by the fact that the Qur'an brings one and the same argument to refute the views of all of them.

It may be explained as follows:

The present Torah and Gospels all together clearly mention the Oneness of God; on the other hand the Gospel clearly mentions the sonship declaring that the Son is the Father and none else.

They do not interpret the postulated sonship in the terms of distinction, honor and excellence, although many verses of the Gospels clearly give this meaning. For example:

> "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (*Matt*., 5:44–48)[1]
>
> "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (*Matt*., 5:16)

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there was but a single, that is, Divine nature, as opposed to the orthodox belief of a single person of double nature. They were named after Jacob Baradaeus through whom they became the national Church of Syria. They flourished in spite of recurring Imperial persecutions, which led them to welcome the Muslim army when it attacked Syria. Although there were many converts to Islam (cir. 640 C.E.), the Jacobite Church continued. The Mongol invasions in 13th and 14th centuries caused their real decline. (Trans.)

1 The quotations of the Old and New Testaments, here and elsewhere, are from King James version, because the Arabic version (printed in 1811 C.E.) used by the author, conforms to it. (Trans.)

> "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven." (*Matt*., 6:1)
>
> "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (*Matt*., 6:9)
>
> "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (*Matt*., 6:14)
>
> "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (*Luke*, 6:36)
>
> Also he said to Mary Magdalene: "go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God." (*John*, 20:17)

These and other similar sentences of the Gospels refer to God as the Father of Jesus as well as of others, all in the sense of distinction and honor.

There are some sayings in the Gospels which allude to the union of the Son with the Father. For example:

> "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." (*John*, 17:1)
>
> Then he went on praying for his disciples and finally said: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gayest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (*John*, 17:20–23)

However, there are other verses which apparently cannot be explained in the terms of distinction and excellence. For example:

> "Thomas saith unto him (that is, Jesus), Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long

time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me." (*John*, 5:11)

"For I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." (*John,* 8:42)

"I and my Father are one." (*John,* 10:30)

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing[1] them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (*Matt*., 28:19)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was light of men." (*John,* 1:1–4)

These and similar other statements of the Gospels have led the Christians to the belief of trinity in unity. The belief of trinity is an attempt to reconcile the belief that the Christ is the Son of God with the belief in one God which the Christ himself had taught. For example, *Mark,* 12:29 quotes him as saying: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."

The believers in the trinity say (although it does not impart any intelligible meaning): God is one substance with three Persons. The word Person denotes an attribute with which a thing appears to others; and the attribute is none other than the thing itself. The three Persons are: The Person of existence, the Person of knowledge, that is, the Word, and the Person of life, that is, the Spirit.

These three Persons are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The first is the Person of existence; the second, the Person of knowledge (the Word); and the third, the Person of life. The Son who is the Word and the Person of knowledge descended from his Father (that is, the Person of existence) accompanied by the Holy Ghost (that is, the Person of Life)

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1 Baptism is a Christian sacrament of initiation into Church by immersing in water or sprinkling water on the head. (Auth.)

that gives light to all things.

Then they differ among themselves in explanation of this vague statement; and ever-occurring conflicts have divided them to more than seventy sects and denominations. We shall mention some of them to the extent that is necessary in the framework of this book.

Think over the above description; then look at what the Qur'an ascribes to the Christians, or quotes them as saying: *and the Christians say, The Messiah is the son of God* (9:30); *Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely God, He is the Messiah, son of Mary* (5:72); *Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely God is the third (Person) of the three* (5:73); *and say not, three; Desist* (4:171). Then you will realize that all these statements point to a single idea, that is, the trinity in unity which is the common factor of all the sects which sprang up in the Christianity (as we have said above).

Why did the Qur'an concentrate on this common factor? It was because the same objections apply to all their beliefs regarding Jesus in spite of their diversity and numerousness. The arguments put by the Qur'an are applicable to all their interpretations with equal force, as will be explained later.

Argument of the Qur'an against the Belief of the Trinity

Coming to the belief of trinity, the Qur'an refutes it in two ways:

First: The general method, that is, showing that it is impossible for God to take a son for Himself, no matter whether the presumed son be Jesus or someone else.

Second: The particular method, that is, describing that Jesus son of Mary was neither a son of God nor God; that he was but a servant created by God.

First Method: What is the quiddity of sonship and birth? What do these words really mean? A living material thing (like man, animal or vegetable) separates from itself a portion of its own matter, then gradually develops it until it becomes another individual of the same species similar to its parent; the offspring has the same characteristics and traits as the parent body had. An animal separates semen from its body, or a plant removes a seed from itself, then it preserves and grows the semen or seed gradually until it becomes another animal or plant similar to its parent. This is what sonship and birth mean. It is no secret that such a thing is impossible for God:

First: Because it needs a physical material body; and God is far above

matter and its concomitants without which matter cannot exist like motion, time, space and other such things.

Second: To God belongs absolute Divinity and Lordship; consequently, He has absolute authority over, and total management of, all things in His hand. Every thing is in need of Him to bring it into existence, and depends on Him for its continuity. It is just impossible to imagine a thing similar to God in "species"—a thing having the identity, attributes and characteristics similar to those of God and independent of Him.

Third: If God could beget or give birth to a son, it would entail graduality of action for God. In other words,He would be governed by the laws of matter and movement; and it is contradiction in term, because whatever takes place by His Will comes into being at once without delay, without graduality.

The above explanations are inferred from the words of God:

And they say: Allah has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him; rather, whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His, all are obedient to Him. The Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees an affair, He only says to it, Be , and it is (2:116–117).

As we have explained above, the words, *Glory be to Him,* are a complete proof; the clause, *whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His; all are obedient to Him, is* another proof; and the verse, *The Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees an affair, He only says to it, Be, and it is,* is a third proof.[1]

It is also possible to take the clause, *The Originator of the heavens and the earth,* as an allegorical expression in which the attribute of the object has been transferred to the subject. In other words, the clause may denote that the heavens and the earth are original in their creation and design; God has created them without any previous model. Therefore, He cannot beget anyone, otherwise it would be a creation on His own model. (After all, the Christians believe that the Son is one with the Father.) In that case this clause would be an independent proof by itself.

The Christians generally use the sentence, 'the Messiah is the Son of God', in a somewhat allegorical sense, and not in its literal meaning. They expand the meaning of sonship. Probably, it means separation of a thing from another of similar quiddity without physical and material division

1 The three proofs point to the above-mentioned three arguments respectively. (Trans.)

and without graduality. This interpretation may remove the problems of body, materiality and graduality. Yet, the problem of similarity will remain unsolved.

The problem of similarity may be described thus: Evidently, to believe in God the Father and God the Son is to believe in number, in real plurality, even if we suppose that the Father and the Son are one in "species" or quiddity. A human father and his son are one because both have the same quiddity, both belong to the homosapien species; but they are in fact more than one because they are two individual human beings. Now, if we suppose that God is one, then all other things (including the Son) would be "no-God"; they would be owned by God and dependent on Him; consequently the putative son would not be a God like Him. On the other hand, if we suppose a son similar to God, free of, not dependent on, Him, then it would invalidate and negate the Oneness of God.

This exposition is found in the following words of God: *and say not, Three . Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; and Allah is sufficient for a Protector* (4:171).

Second Method: Jesus son of Mary could not be a son of God sharing Godhead with Him, because he was a human being having all the concomitants of humanity.

The Messiah was conceived by Mary and grew up in her womb; then she brought him forth as women give birth to their children, and brought him up, as a child is brought up by his mother. He grew up proceeding through normal stages: from infancy to childhood, from youth to the middle age. All this time, his condition was like any other normal human being in march of life. He was governed by all normal accidents and conditions undergone by other men. He was hungry and satiated; felt joy and sorrow; was pleased and displeased; affected by delight and pain, comfort and discomfort; he ate and drank, slept and woke up, was tired and rested etc.

This was the condition of Jesus when he was among the people. Doubtlessly a person having such characteristics is just a mortal man like any other member of his species. As such he, like all other human beings, was a creature made by God. Now, let us look at the miracles and supernatural things that happened on his hand, like giving life to dead bodies, creating the birds and healing the blind and leper. Also, there are extraordinary signs related to his birth, that is, his conception without

father. All these things are supernatural, against the normal custom which people are familiar with; yet they are unfamiliar because of their rarity, not because they are impossible. There was Adam who by evidence of the heavenly Books was created from dust and had no father. And here are the prophets, for example: Ṣāliḥ, Abraham and Moses on whose hand so many miraculous signs had appeared (which are mentioned in revealed scriptures). But nobody thinks that those miracles negated their humanity or proved their divinity.

This method has been used in the verses: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah is the third* (Person) *of the three ; and there is no god but the One God, … The Messiah, son of Mary is but an apostle; apostles before him have indeed passed away; and his mother was a truthful woman, they both used to eat food. See how We make the signs clear to them, then behold how they are turned away* (5:73–75).

Eating food has been specially selected for mention in preference to other activities, because it rather more forcefully proves his materiality and shows his neediness and wants, which cannot be combined with Godhead. Obviously, a person who by his nature feels hunger and thirst and satisfies it with a morsel of food and a cup of water, is nothing but an embodiment of poverty and need—a need that cannot be removed without help of some extraneous agent. How can such a man be God? What is the meaning of such divinity? A man surrounded by needs, depending for their fulfilment on something outside his own being, is deficient in himself, and managed by some other than himself. He cannot be self-sufficient god; rather he shall be a creature who is looked after by the Lord the Lord Who has His creatures' affairs in His Own Hand. The verse 5:17 may possibly be explained in this light: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah He is the Messiah, son of Mary . Say: Who then could control any thing as against Allah when He wished to destroy the Messiah son of Mary and his mother and all those on the earth? And Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and what is between them; He creates what He pleases; and Allah has power over all things.*

The same is the case with the verse (coming after 5:75 quoted above) addressing the Christians: *Say: Do you worship besides Allah that which does not control for you any harm, or any profit? And Allah—He is the Hearing, the Knowing* (5:76).

The basis and theme of such arguments is this: Jesus, as is seen from his condition and affairs, lived according to, and was governed by, the

natural law which permeates a man's life. He had all the attributes, did all the deeds, and underwent all the conditions which a human being does; like eating, drinking, fulfilling all other human needs, showing all characteristics of the human race. Also this material involvement, these physical attributes were real; not an illusion or imagination. Jesus, was a real man who had those natural attributes, conditions and actions. The Gospels contain many verses in which he calls himself man and son of man; are full of the stories of his eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, travelling, tiring, speaking and many such things which cannot be explained away, nor can they be interpreted otherwise. This being the case, the position of the Messiah would be the same as that of other human beings; he did not own or control any affair of the others, and he could be destroyed like others.

The same is the implication of his prayers and invocations; no doubt that he worshipped God, his intention being to reach nearer to God, with humbleness and humility to the sublimity and majesty of God; certainly it was not for the purpose of teaching others how to pray or for any other such aim.

The verse 4:172 arguing against Jesus' supposed divinity points to his prayer. God says: *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and whoever disdains His worship and is proud, He will gather them all together to Himself.* Jesus' service and worship is the first and foremost proof that he was not God and that he had no share in Godhead which is reserved for the One other than him. How can a man put himself in the position of servitude to himself? How can he be the slave of himself? How can a thing be self-sufficient in the same framework in which it is dependent on someone else? The answer is clear: In no way.

Likewise, the worship of the angels clearly shows that they are not God's daughters. Nor is the Holy Ghost a God, because they all are worshippers of God and obedient to Him. God says: *And they say: The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. Nay! they are honored servants; they do not precede Him in speech and* (only) *according to His commandment do they act. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble* (21:26–28).

Moreover, the Gospels contain verses showing that the Spirit or Ghost is obedient to God and His messengers, following their commands, acting on their orders. There is no sense in saying that a thing orders itself or

obeys itself, or that it accepts and acts on the orders of its own creatures (that is, messengers).

In the same way as Jesus' worship of God proves that Jesus was not God, his call to the people to worship God proves it; as the verse points to it: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah, He is the Messiah, son of Mary ; and the Messiah said: O Children of Israel! worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord, surely whoever associates (others) with Allah, then Allah has forbidden to him the garden, and his abode is the fire; and there shall be no helpers for the unjust* (5:72). The method of argument used in this verse is self-evident.

Although the Gospels do not contain such comprehensive sentence as, *worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord* , they are full of his sayings calling people to God and to His worship; he repeatedly declares that God is his Lord in Whose Hand is the management of his affairs; he openly says that God is the Lord of the people; and never invites them to his own worship—in spite of his reported saying: "I and my Father are one" (*John,* 10:30). If we accept that it is a correct reporting, then, all things taken together, it must mean: my obedience is God's obedience; thus, it shall have the same connotation as the verse of the Qur'an: *Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah* (4:80).

Jesus is an Intercessor, not a Redeemer

The Christians believe that Jesus Christ atoned for their sins with his blood; and that is why they call him the Redeemer, the Saviour. They explain this belief as follows:

> "Adam disobeyed God by partaking of the forbidden tree; it was a sin which remained with Adam, and it is inherited by his progeny who come into this world burdened with that original sin; and the recompense of sin is punishment in the next world, the eternal perdition, the everlasting ruin—which cannot be warded off. And God is Merciful and Just—both at the same time.
>
> "This situation created a knotty problem which defied all solutions: If God were to punish Adam and his progeny for their sin, it would have been against the mercy for which He had created them; and if He were to forgive them, it would have been against His Justice. Justice demands that a sinner should be punished for his sins and errors, just as a good-doer and obedient person

should be rewarded for his good deeds.[1]

"This problem remained unsolved until God solved it through Christ. Christ—the Son of God who was Himself God—entered the womb of a descendant of Adam, that is, the Virgin Mary, and was born from her as a human being is born. In this way, he was a complete man, because he was a son of man; and at the same time, was a complete God, because he was the Son of God.

"And the Son of God, being God Himself, was sinless and protected from every sin and error.

"He lived among his people for sometime, mixing and dealing with them; he joined them in eating and drinking, talked and walked with them and befriended them. Thereafter he surrendered to his enemies enabling them to kill him the worst killing—killing by crucifixion, because one who is crucified is, according to the Divine Scriptures, cursed by God.

"He took upon Himself the Divine curse and crucifixion, with all the condemnations, sufferings and chastisement which it entails. In this way he redeemed the people through his sacrifice, in order that they might be saved from the chastisement of the hereafter and the eternal perdition. Thus, he is the atonement for the sins of the believers, nay, for the sins of the whole world."[2]

This is what the Christians believe.

The Christians have made this theory (that is, the crucifixion and atonement) the foundation of their religion. It is the Alpha and Omega of their call and mission—in the same manner as the Qur'an has founded the Islam and its mission on monotheism; as God says addressing His Messenger: *Say: This is my way: I invite (you) unto Allah: with clear sight* (are) *I and he who follows me; and glory be to Allah; and I am not of the*

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1 That is what most of the Christians believe. But some of them, like Bishop Mār Isaac, say that there is no difficulty if one refrains from inflicting a threatened punishment. In other words, it is all right not to fulfil a threat, although one is not allowed to break a promise of reward. (Auth.)
Bishop Mār Isaac's view has been taken from al-Shahristāni's *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, pp. 223–224. (Trans.)

2 "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ—the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John, 2:1–2) (Auth.)

polytheists (12:108).

It is the Christians' belief in spite of the fact that Christ (as the Gospels clearly say, and we have mentioned earlier) used to admonish them first of all to believe in one God and to love Him.

The Muslims as well as many non-Muslims have shown the Christians the defects and invalidity of the above-mentioned belief of Christianity. Countless books and booklets have been written and numerous pamphlets and articles published, showing that this theory is not only contrary to logic and reason, but is also contradictory to the Books of the Old and the New Testaments. What we are concerned with here—and what comes within the purview of this book of ours—is to show how this idea is opposed to the basic Qur'anic teachings, and to explain the difference between intercession (as confirmed by the Qur'an) and atonement (as claimed by the Christians).

Moreover, the Qur'an clearly says that it talks with the people explaining the things in such a way as to bring it to the level of their understanding, to make it easier for them to grasp its realities. It explains what helps them to distinguish the truth from the falsehood, so that they may accept that and reject this. It enables him to differentiate between virtue and evil, between beneficial and harmful, so that he may take the one and leave the other. The fact that the Qur'an keeps in view the level of the healthy reason and understanding is abundantly clear to all who study the Divine Book.

Now let us have a critical look at the above mentioned Christian theory of atonement:

First: They say that Adam committed a sin by eating from the forbidden tree. But the Qur'an refutes this idea in two ways:

(1) The said prohibition was not like a binding order given by a master to his slave; it was only an advisory counsel aiming at the good of the person so advised—in order that he may live more comfortably. Such an advice does not bring any judicial reward or punishment whether one acts upon it or ignores it. It is not different from the order or prohibition of an advisor to the one who seeks his advice, or the directions given by a physician to his patient. What happens in such situations is this. If the person concerned acts upon the advice, he achieves what is good and beneficial to him in this life; and if he neglects such advice, he may come to harm in this world. When Adam ate from the forbidden tree, the only harm he suffered was his removal from the Garden, and thus he lost the comfort and happiness he had been enjoying there. But there was no question at

all of any punishment of hereafter, because he had not disobeyed any compulsory legislative order which could have resulted in "punishment". (For detail, see the Commentary of the verses 2:35–39).[1]

(2) Adam was a prophet: The Qur'an clearly says that the prophets were sinless; they were protected by God from committing sins and transgressing the "orders" of God. Logical reasons support this belief and the Qur'an proves it.[2]

Second: They say that the said sin remained with Adam. But the Qur'an rejects this idea when it says: *Then his* (Adam's) *Lord chose him, so He turned to him (with mercy) and guided (him)* (20:122); *Then Adam received (some) words from his Lord, so He turned to him mercifully; surely He is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful* (2:37). The reason also supports, nay, proves it. Retribution of sin is a frightening and formidable thing which the reason—or the master—thinks necessary for him who disobeys the command or shows obstinacy; it is from fear of punishment that legislations and laws are obeyed. Had there been no reward and punishment, the mastership could not be enforced and no order or prohibition would be obeyed. The master has the right and power to punish the sinners for their sins as well as to give rewards to the obedient ones for their obedience. Likewise, it lies within his power to exercise his discretion in a way he thinks fit, within the jurisdiction of his mastership. He has every right to pass over and overlook the disobedience and mistakes of wrong-doers by forgiving and pardoning them their sins and wrongs. This power of forgiveness is a part of management and rule as much as is the authority to mete out punishment. There is no doubt in any mind that forgiveness and pardon, in certain cases, is good and commendable when the forgiver has full power to punish; even today reasonable persons practise it and put it into effect. In this background, there is no reason why a wrong done by a man should remain attached to him forever. Otherwise, forgiveness and pardon would have no meaning at all. One forgives and pardons for erasing a mistake, for nullifying the effect of a sin; and if we say that the mistake and sin remains attached and cannot be removed, then forgiveness and pardon are meaningless. Moreover, the Divine Revelation is full of descriptions of forgiveness and pardon; also

1 See *al-Mīzān*, Eng. vol. 1. (Trans.)

2 See the author's discourse on the sinlessness of the prophets in Eng. vol. 3 under verse 2:213. (Trans.)

the Old and New Testaments speak of it.

Not only that, even the afore-mentioned "Christian dogma" speaks about it. In short, the claim that a certain sin or mistake had been attached to a man, which could not be erased or forgiven even after repentance and expression of sorrow, even after returning to the Lord with sincerity, is a thing which no reason would accept, nor would any straight thinking person agree with.

Third: They say that the sin of Adam has remained attached not only to him but even to his progeny up to the Day of Resurrection. It means that the punishment of a crime of one person was extended to the others too who had no hand in that sin. In other words, a slave commits a sin and the master widens the circle of punishment to include even those who were in no way connected with that sin! (We are not speaking about a situation where someone had committed a sin and his descendants were pleased with his action; because in that case all would be counted as sinners.) What the Christians say puts the burden of sin on those who had nothing to do with that supposed sin. And the Qur'an rejects it when it says: *That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another: and that there is not for man (aught) except what he strives for* (53:38–39). Sound reason supports this dictum, because it is an evil to penalize someone for a sin he has not committed. (Vide the discourse on the "Deeds," under the verses 2:216–218.)[1]

Fourth: Their argument is based on a misconception that every mistake and sin—without any exception—throws the man into eternal perdition. In other words, sins do not differ in size and magnitude—all are great and capital. But the Qur'an teaches us that the sins and errors are of various categories: some are great, others small; some may be forgiven, others like polytheism shall not be forgiven except after repentance. God says: *If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins and cause you to enter an honorable (place of) entering* (4:31); *Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases* (4:48). Thus God has taught us that some of the forbidden things, that is, sins and mistakes, are great, and others are, by implication, small; some are not forgivable while others are forgiven. In any case, sins vary in their seriousness, and not every sin puts the sinner in eternal perdition or ever

1 See *al-Mīzān*, Eng. vol. 3. (Trans.)

burning fire.

Reason also refuses to lump all sins together, to put all mistakes in one category. A slap on face is different from murder; a lustful eye and fornication are not one; and so on. Never in the long human history have people treated all sins and errors alike. Sane persons in every age have prescribed different punishments for different crimes. How can it be possible to bracket all sins together without any discrimination, when there is so clear difference among them? In view of this accepted difference, only a few of them may cause eternal perdition, never-ending chastisement (for example) associating others whit God, as the Qur'an has said: Obviously going against the prohibition of partaking of a tree cannot be put in the category of disbelief in God or polytheism or things like that. Thus there is no reason why it should cause an eternal punishment. (Vide the above-mentioned discourse on Deeds).

Fifth: Let us look at what they have said about the problem of the conflict between the Divine attributes of mercy and justice; how a plan was devised to overcome that difficulty; and how Christ came down and then ascended to heaven to effect that scheme—with all the ramifications they have mentioned.

Ponder on this statement and its concomitants, and see what type of god they believe in. Here you will find a Creator God Who is the beginning and the end of this created universe and all its components. But all His actions emanate from a will and a knowledge which are found in Him; and His will depends on an academic preference—in the same way as a man opts for a course of action after weighing its pros and cons according to his knowledge. Likewise, God ponders on the positive and negative sides of a thing and then decides whether to do it or not. Sometimes He makes a wrong choice and repents for it[1]; at other times He meditates upon a problem without finding its correct solution; often He remains unaware of many affairs. In short, in their eyes, God in His attributes and actions is not different from a man. Whatever He does, He does it after thinking and meditating over it, directing His endeavours to the advantages of that action. His decision is thus governed and controlled by some extraneous factors, that is, the said advantages. He may find His way to the correct decision; also He may take a wrong decision; there may

1 "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Gen., 6:6). (Auth.)

be error, misunderstanding or forgetfulness in the course He has taken. Sometimes He knows, at other times He does not; often He overpowers, and frequently is Himself overpowered. His power, like His knowledge, is limited. When all this is believed about Him, then it should be equally possible for Him to be subjected to all the conditions which prevail in a human being who decides to do a work after pondering on its pros and cons: God will thus experience joy and grief, vainglory and shame, happiness and sorrow—and things like that. Needless to say that such a being would be a physical and material one, governed by the laws of movement, change and gradual completion. A thing having these attributes must be a transient being, a created thing; it cannot be the Self-existing God Who is the Creator of all things.

If you study the Old and New Testaments, you will know that all that we have said above is true; and that they believe in a god who has a body and has all the attributes found in a body, and especially in a man.

As for the Qur'an, it declares the Lord's glory in all these matters, showing that He is far above such myths and superstitions, as it says: *Glory be to Allah (for freedom) from what they describe* (37:159). We have many incontestable rational proofs to show that God is One in Whom all the attributes of perfection are united. His are the existence without any hint of inexistence, absolute power without any shade of weakness, all-encompassing knowledge without any taint of ignorance, absolute life without any possibility of death or destruction. This being the case, there can never come any change in His existence, power, knowledge or life.

Consequently, He cannot be a body or a thing related to body, because body and the things connected to it are surrounded by change and alteration, subdued by incorporeality, neediness and shortcomings. As He is not a body, nor related to body, He is not subjected to varying circumstances or changing conditions; He is far above forgetfulness or obliviousness, mistake or repentance, undecidedness or uncertainty, reaction or despondency, weakness or defeat—and things like that. We have fully explained the rational arguments (related) to these topics in this book in relevant places; those who want a thorough study should look for them under relevant verses.

A discerning reader may easily judge between the two beliefs: Here is the Qur'an, declaring the glory of the Lord of the universe; it affirms for Him every attribute of perfection, and asserts His freedom from every imperfection; and declares that He is too great to be comprehended by our

understanding—beset as it is by limitations and imperfections. And there are the Old and New Testaments describing God in terms which can only be found in the Greek, Indian and Chinese mythologies of the ancient times; and ascribing to Him such things which primitive man imagined and which his superstition led him to believe.

Sixth: They say that God sent His Son, Christ, and told him to enter into the womb of a woman—in order that he could be born a man while he was a god. It is the same unintelligible theory which has been strongly refuted by the Qur'an; there is no need to repeat here the earlier explained Qur'anic arguments against it.

Also the reason does not support this theory. First look at the attributes which are essential for the Self-existing Being. His existence is eternal, without beginning or end; there can be no change in Him; His existence knows no limit; He encompasses everything, but Himself is above the limits of time, space and their concomitants. Then think over the creation of man from the time he was a sperm to the stage when it is a foetus in a womb—no matter which interpretation you accept for this human birth of god: that of the Melchites, or the Nestorians, or the Jacobites or some other groups. In the end you will have to admit that there is no relationship between a thing that has a physical body with all its accidents and concomitants and a Being that has neither a body nor any of its concomitants or accidents (like time, space, movement etc.). How can one even think of unity between the two in any way?

The fact is that this theory does not agree with self-evident rational propositions. That is why St. Paul and other leaders of Christianity hold philosophy in contempt and spurn and disdain rational arguments. St. Paul writes: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? … For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified." (Epistle of Paul, ch. 1)[1]

We find a lot of pronouncements—in similar vein—in his as well as in others' writings. This line was adopted only for propagation of their ideas and missionary activities. Anyone pondering on these epistles and books and studying the way they address the people may easily understand the

1 1 Corinthians, 1:19–23. (Trans.)

motive behind it.

The above discourse also exposes the flaw in their statement that: "God is sinless and protected from sins and errors." The God they have imagined is not safe from errors at all; He errs in His perceptions and He errs in His actions. Of course, He does not disobey anyone because none is superior to Him. That is why the question of sin and disobedience does not arise at all, so far as God is concerned. Consequently, it is irrelevant, nay, unimaginable, to say that He is "protected from sins".

Seventh: They say that God became man and then lived with his people as a man lives in society until he surrendered to his enemies.

It means that the Self-existent God may acquire for Himself some properties especially reserved for transient and incorporeal creatures—only then He can be God and man all at the same time. If so, then He can also become any of His other creatures; He may acquire for Himself the reality of any of the species created by Him. One day He may appear as a man, the next day as a horse; sometimes as a bird, at other times as an insect, and so on. He may even acquire more than one reality at a time, that is, He may come to this world as a combination of several species, for example, He may appear as perfect man and perfect horse and perfect insect, all at the same time.

Likewise, He may do any action done by His creatures—because He may appear as a certain species and then would do the actions reserved for that species. Going a step further, it would be possible for Him to do two opposite things together like justice and injustice, or to acquire opposite attributes for Himself, for example, knowledge and ignorance, power and lack of power, life and death, want and freedom from want. Glory be to God Who is far above such absurdities! (This snag is different from the one explained in the Sixth Objection.)

Eighth: They say that he suffered until he was crucified and took the curse upon himself, because a crucified person is cursed. What do they really mean when they say that he took the curse upon himself? What is the meaning of curse? In common usage and language curse means removal from Divine Mercy and Honor. Does that supposed curse imply the same meaning? Or is it something else? If it has the same meaning which is known to the language and common usage, then how can God remove Himself from His own mercy? Or, how can anyone else remove Him away from His own mercy? What is mercy? It is a positive bestowal, a grant of favors and bounties, a bequeathal of the specialties of existence.

When one is cursed—taken away from Divine Mercy—it results in poverty, disgrace or effects like that—in this world or the next or in both. This being the case, what is the sense of saying that God was effected by curse? Choose any meaning for curse, it cannot apply to God the God Who is Self-sufficient and fulfills the needs of everything.

The Qur'anic teaching is diametrically opposed to this truly amazing theory of the New Testament. God says: *O men! you are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is He Who is Self-sufficient, the Praised One* (35:15). Also the names and attributes of God mentioned in the Qur'an make it clear that it is impossible for any type of need or want, shortcoming or defect, loss or extinction, evil or abomination, disgrace or stigma to reach the sublime majesty of God.

Poser: God suffered disgrace and took the curse upon Himself only because He became one with man. Otherwise, He in His own Self is too high to be affected by such things.

Reply: Did God, by becoming one with man, take upon Himself that curse and those sufferings in real sense of the word? Or, was it all just a metaphor, only an allegory? If it was in real sense, our objection stands. And if it was only in a metaphorical sense, then the original "problem" would remain unsolved; the birth of Christ would not solve the conflict between Divine Mercy and Divine Justice. If it was not God—but someone else—who suffered all those indignities and curse—the so-called scheme of atonement would remain unfulfilled. Obviously, the said plan was based on the idea that God Himself should be the ransom for human beings.

Ninth: They say that Jesus atoned for the sins of the believers, nay, for the sins of the whole world. This talk shows that they do not understand the real meaning of sin and error, nor do they comprehend how the sins bring the next world's punishment, or how that punishment is affected. Also, they have not grasped the relationship between sins and errors on one side and Divine Legislation on the other, nor do they know the stand of the shariah about it. But the Qur'an clearly describes all these things and teaches us these realities—as we have explained in the Commentaries of verses 2:26 (*Surely Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable …*) and 2:213 (*Mankind was but one nation...*). We have described there that the orders and laws (which might be the subject of disobedience) and the sins and errors all are mentally posited things based on subjective consideration. They have been made for the protection of society's welfare; and the punishment of its disobedience is the unpleasant result which

has been prescribed with a single aim in view to discourage and prevent a responsible man from indulging into sin, from disobeying the law. This is the view of the sages who have laid the foundation of human society.

But the Qur'anic teaching leads us to a still higher level in this respect (and the rational reasoning supports it, as we have explained). It says that when a man obeys the shariah prescribed for him by God, his psyche acquires some noble and praiseworthy inner traits; and if he disobeys the said shariah, he acquires unworthy, hideous and evil traits. It is these deeply ingrained traits and characteristics which prepare for him the rewards or punishments of the next life, respectively. That reward and punishment is represented by the Paradise and the Hell, respectively—and their respective reality is nearness to God or distance from Him. Thus the merit and demerit of deeds are based on things which actually exist and have a system. Unlike our social laws they are not based on any imaginary thing emanating from subjective consideration.

Also it is not a secret that the Divine Legislation perfects and completes the Divine Creation. It brings the creative guidance to its final destination. In other words, God brings every thing to the perfections of its existence, to the final goal of its being. And among the perfections of human existence are a good social system in this world, and a happy, bounteous life in the hereafter. The way to that perfection is religion which enacts and promulgates laws for society's reform and development, and contains d[i]rections for reaching nearer to God (and these directives are called acts of worship). When a man follows the laws of religion, his life and livelihood are improved, and his soul becomes ready to receive God's bounties; and he is qualified—in his self and in his actions—for the Divine Honor in the hereafter. All of this emanates from the light put in his heart, and the purity that is found in his self. This in short is the reality.

Man gets nearer to God or goes far away from Him. This nearness and distance are the foundations of his eternal happiness and unhappiness, respectively—and also for his social development (or otherwise) in this life. And religion is the only factor that brings about his nearness and distance. All these are real things, not based on imaginary assumptions or subjective considerations.

Now suppose that one putative sin of Adam—his partaking of the forbidden tree—brought eternal perdition on him, and not only on him, but on all his descendants also; and that there was no remedy for it, no relief from that ruination—except atonement through Christ. Then what

was the use of sending religion—any religion—before Christ? And what was the use of ordaining it with Christ? And what is the use of promulgating it after Christ?

Let us put it this way: Eternal perdition and punishment in hereafter was a firmly-decreed fate of man—because of the said sin; it could not be removed or averted from him either through good deeds or through repentance; the only effective remedy was the atonement through Christ's suffering and crucifixion. Then why did God promulgate the laws, revealed the books, and sent the prophets and messengers? What was the sense behind all this exercise? Were not all those promises and threats, all those good tidings and warnings devoid of truth? What could all those endeavors avail mankind when the whole species was doomed to perdition, and when eternal punishment was their firmly-decreed fate?

Also, suppose there were people who perfected themselves by sincerely following the previous shariah (and there were countless prophets and also men of God in previous nations who were like that, for example, the honored prophets Abraham, Moses and others); they lived perfectly and died before the time of atonement. Now what would you say about them? Did they end their life in infelicity and perdition? Or in felicity and happiness? What did they face when they met death and went to the next world? Did death bring them to chastisement and ruination? Or to Divine bounties and happy life?

Moreover, Christ clearly says that he was sent only to save the sinners and wrong-doers, and that good-doers and righteous have no need of such help.[1]

Frankly speaking, no valid reason can be given for promulgating the Divine Laws, for ordaining the religious values—before the supposed atonement was affected through Christ; it was but a vain, senseless and aimless exercise. Nor can any good and correct reason be advanced for this "strange" action of God. The only thing that can be said is this:

God knew very well that, unless the problem of Adam's sin was solved, no law promulgated by Him would do any good. Yet He went on

1 "But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke, 5:30–32) (Auth.)

promulgating those laws just to be on safe side, hoping that one of these days He would get a chance to solve this problem and then He would be able to harvest the fruits of those legislation! Thus He legislated the laws and promulgated them through the prophets—hiding the truth from the prophets and their people alike. He did not tell them that there was a big problem which—if it remained unsolved—would nullify all the efforts of the whole group of the prophets and the believers, and which would render all the laws ineffective and useless. On the contrary, He pretended that the legislations and the prophetic missions were very serious, very important and very real things.

Thus God deceived the people, and deceived Himself too. He deceived the people by promising that their safety and happiness was guaranteed if they faithfully followed the shariah. And He deceived Himself because, once the atonement was affected, legislation of the shariah would become irrelevant, without having any effect on the people's felicity—in the same way as it was without any effect as long as the problem of Adam's sin was not solved. This was the case before affectation of the said atonement.

Coming to the time when atonement was affected, and to the later days, ineffectiveness and futility of the shariah, of prophetic mission and of Divine Guidance is much more self-evident. What is the use or benefit of believing in divinely sent realities and doing good deeds now that the problem of the original sin has been solved, and the atonement has brought forgiveness and mercy to all men, believers and unbelievers, righteous and unrighteous, all alike, without any difference between the most impeccable righteous one and the most incorrigible impious one: Both were to suffer eternal perdition when the original sin was not redeemed and both are to share in the Divine Mercy now that it has been redeemed through the said atonement. (Remember that no good deed could remove that stigma, if there were no atonement.)

Objection: The atonement would benefit only those who believe in Christ. Therefore, the prophetic mission did have its use and benefit, as Christ has said in the Gospel.[1]

Reply: First of all, it contradicts the saying of St. John referred to earlier. Secondly, it destroys all the edifice built so far, because nobody

1 "Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." (Luke, 12:8–9) (Auth.)

right from Adam to the Last Day—would enter the sanctuary of safety and deliverance except a very small group, that is, those who believe in Christ and the Holy Ghost; and not even all the Christians but only a certain group among all those widely differing denominations—all other denominations would be thrown into eternal perdition. I wish I knew what would happen to the honored prophets (who came) before Christ, and to the believers of their nation! What would be the status of their mission, of the books they brought and of the wisdom they taught? Was it true? Or just a lie? The Gospels verify the Torah and its mission, and there is no mention at all of the Ghost and the atonement in the Torah. Does the Gospel verify a true book? Or does it verify a pack of lies?

Poser: As we know, the previously revealed books give the good tidings of Christ. This was a sort of a general call by them towards Christ, although they did not give any detail about his coming and atoning the sin. God was always telling His prophets about the advent of Christ in order that they might believe in him and be happy with what he would do.

Reply: First: To make such claims for the prophets before Moses is to shoot in the dark, to venture into terra incognita. Moreover, if there was any good news, it was not an invitation to believe in, and follow, him. Secondly, that good tiding does not solve the problem of futility of the shariah; if Christ delivered all those who believed in him, then was it not useless and futile to invite people to follow the laws of the shariah and to practice good ethics and morality? Even Christ exhorted people to follow the rules of religion and be of good conduct; and the Gospels are full of his sermons to this effect. Thirdly, the basic problem still remains. They had talked about the original sin and the unfulfillment of the Divine Purpose, and that purpose is still unfulfilled. God had created mankind to bestow His mercy on all of them, to cover all of them with His favor and bounties, felicity and happiness. But what is the result? Almost all of them—with the exception of a small group—are going to be punished, suffering under the wrath of God, thrown into eternal perdition.

These are just a few of the rational reasons showing the absurdity and invalidity of this theory. The Qur'an too supports these reasons. God says: *Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal)* (20:50). He has made it clear that everything is guided to its goal and to what its existence demands. The guidance is of two kinds: creative and legislative. It is the established way of God to bestow every relevant guidance on everything, and it includes the religious guidance

bestowed on man.

Then God says—and it is the first religious guidance given to Adam and those who were sent down with him from the Garden: *We said: Get down you therefrom all together; if there comes to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve, And (as to) those who disbelieve in and belie our signs, they are the inmates of the fire, in it they shall abide* (2:38–39). It gives in a nut-shell what various laws were to promulgate in detail up to the Day of Resurrection; it contains legislation as well as promise and threat—all in clear terms without ambiguity. Again He says: … *and the truth do I speak* (38:84); *The word is not changed with Me, nor am I in the least unjust to the servants* (50:29). God declares that He has no hesitation or misgiving about what He decides, He does not break what He has joined; whatever He decides, He enforces; and what He says, He enacts; His action does not deviate from the line He has prescribed for it. He does not waver or hesitate when He wills; nor is it befitting to His knowledge that He should intend a thing and then some demerit should appear in that course of action which He did not know before and thus He should decide not to do it. Nor can anyone else hinder His plan: It is not that He should will a thing, deciding to do it and then some rational defect should prevent Him from doing it, or some snag should appear in its execution and He should abandon the plan—because all such things, if they ever happened, would show helplessness of God. God says: *and Allah is predominant over His affairs* (12:21); *surely Allah attains His purpose* (65:3); and Moses is reported as saying: *The knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a book: errs not my Lord, nor does He forget* (20:52); and God says about the Day of Judgment: *This day every soul shall be rewarded for what it has earned; no injustice (shall be done) this day; surely Allah is quick in reckoning* (40:17).

These and similar other verses clearly show that God, after creating His creatures, has not neglected to look after their affairs, nor is He ignorant of what they would do, nor is He sorry for what He has done. As He is constantly looking after their welfare, He has ordained for them His laws—a serious and important legislation which He has ordained not because He is afraid of something or expects to gain something through it. He shall reward every doer for his action—if good, then good; and if evil, then evil. In all these affairs nobody can overpower Him, nor can anyone impose his will on Him—because He has no partner or colleague. There will be neither any ransom nor any redemption to save anyone; nor

can anyone intercede for someone without God's permission. Because all such propositions are against His absolute ownership which He has over His creatures.

Tenth: Let us look at the story of atonement. What is atonement or ransom? A man—or a thing related to him—is involved in some crimes or sin, as a result of which he faces the possibilities of harm or destruction of life or valuable property; and therefore he offers something less important in order to save his life or the more valuable property. A man taken prisoner redeems himself with offer of some money; crimes are redeemed with money paid as fine. The thing given for this purpose is called ransom, fine or redemption. Atonement, in short, is a deal which transfers the right of the claimant from the person so redeemed to the thing given in ransom or redemption—and thus the redeemed one is saved from captivity or from the evil consequences of the crime he had committed.

This description shows that atonement and redemption is simply unimaginable in the matters related to God. The Divine Authority—unlike human authority which is merely an abstracted idea, a subjective consideration—is the real authority which cannot be changed or transferred. Things, in their species and with their effects, actions and reactions, have been created by God and continue to exist because of Him. It is a reality, a fact; and reality and fact cannot change into non-reality, non-fact. Such a proposition cannot be imagined—let alone its ever coming into being. God's ownership, authority and rights are not like those of us human beings. We are bound with social norms and laws. Our social rights, authority and ownership are merely subjective considerations, abstracted ideas based on our imaginations; their status and worth is in our own hands; we may establish a right today and abolish it tomorrow—as our interest and outlook change concerning our life and livelihood. For details see Commentaries of the verses 1:4 (*the Master of the Day of Judgment*)[1], and 3:26 (*Say: 'O Allah, Master of the Kingdom …* ')[2].

God has specifically refuted the idea of atonement in the following verse: *So today ransom shall not be accepted from you nor from those who disbelieved; your abode is the fire* (57:15). And as explained earlier, the same is the import of the words of the Messiah quoted by God in the Qur'an:

1 See *al-Mīzān*, Eng. vol. 1. (Pub.)

2 See *al-Mīzān*, Eng. vol. 5 (Pub.)

And when Allah will say: O Jesus son of Mary! did you say to men, 'Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah' , he will say: Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); … I did not say to them save that what Thou didst enjoin me with: 'That worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord', and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things. If Thou shouldst chastise them, then surely they are The servants; and if Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise (5:116–118). His words: *And I was a witness of them so long as I was among them … ,* have the following import: 'I had nothing to do with them except what Thou hadst entrusted me to do, that is, conveying Thy message to them and being a witness over them—as long as I was among them; whether Thou shouldst chastise them or shouldst forgive them, entirely depends on Thy discretion; I have nothing to do with it. I do not have any authority on Thy will, with which I could save them from Thy chastisement or sentence them to punishment.'

It clearly refutes the idea of ransom and atonement. Had there been any ransoming or redeeming, it would have been wrong for him to wash his hands of the fate of his nation, telling God that it was His (God's) discretion whether to punish them or forgive them, and that he (Jesus) had nothing to do with it.

Of similar connotation are the following verses:

And be on your guard against the Day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped (2:48).

… before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession (2:254).

The day on which you will turn back retreating; there shall be no savior for you from Allah (40:33).

Obviously, the "compensation" (in the first verse), the "bargaining" (of the second) and the "savior" (of the third) all apply to the idea of atonement and redemption; the verses in refuting these things refute the belief of atonement.

Of course, the Qur'an accepts the Messiah as one of the intercessors but not as a redeemer. We have explained about "Intercession" under the verse 2:48 (*And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall*

not avail another...)[1]. We have explained there that intercession shows the nearness of the intercessor and his good standing with the master, without there being any transfer of authority from the master to the intercessors; without affecting in any way the ownership or power of the master; without nullifying or abrogating the master's commandment which the sinner had disobeyed; and without negating the system of recompense, reward and punishment. Intercession is but a sort of prayer and request by the intercessor that the master—in this case, the Lord—should manage the affairs of His creature with mercy. The intercessor accepts the Master's right to punish the sinner (because he had sinned and the law of recompense makes him liable to punishment), but asks the Master to exercise His power of forgiveness—because He has the right to forgive as He has the right to punish.

The intercessor thus requests the Master to exercise His right of pardon and forgiveness, when the sinner has become liable for punishment, without in any way affecting the Master's ownership or authority. But atonement is something else; it is a deal, a bargain, which transfers the Master's authority from the sinner to the ransom given in his place, and removes the sinner from the Master's power as soon as the Master accepts the ransom in his place.

That the Messiah is an intercessor is proven by the following verse: *And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know* (43:86). It clearly says that the people excepted would have the authority to intercede. Jesus is among those whom they call besides God. But he has the authority of intercession because he is included in the exception: God confirms in the Qur'an that He had taught him (Jesus) the Book and the Wisdom, and that he (Jesus) shall be among the witnesses on the Day of Judgment. God says: *And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom* (3:48), and quotes him as saying: *and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them* (5:117). He also says: *and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them* (4:159).

All these verses read together prove that Jesus is one of the intercessors. We have described it in detail under the following verse: *And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another in the least …* (2:48).

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1 See *al-Mīzān*, Eng. vol. 1. (Pub.)

The Origin of These Beliefs

The Qur'an rejects the idea that these theories and beliefs were started or propagated by Jesus. The fact is that the Christians blindly followed their leaders, leaving all affairs in their hands; and the leaders transplanted the myths of ancient idolators into Christianity. God says: *And the Jews say: ʿUzayr is the son of Allah ; and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah ; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allah destroy them; how they are turned away! They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah, and (also) the Messiah son of Mary, and they were not enjoined but that they should worship one God only, there is no god but He; far from His Glory be what they set up (with Him)* (9:30–31).

Who are the unbelievers whom God refers to when He says: *they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before?* Surely it does not refer to the idolaters of pre-Islamic Arabia, who said that the angels were the daughters of God. Because the People of the Book believed God to have a son long before they came into contact with the Arabs—and especially so the Jews; while the words, *who disbelieved before,* apparently refer to the unbelievers who were before the Jews and the Christians. Moreover, the Arabs themselves were not the originators of idol-worship—it was brought to them from abroad.[1]

Moreover, the idolaters of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Syria and India were

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1 It is said that the first man to place idols in the Kaʿbah and to call the people to their worship was ʿAmr b. Luḥayy, a contemporary of Shāpūr Dhu al-Aktāf. He became the chief of his people in Mecca and took over the management of the House. Then he journeyed to the Syrian city, al-Balqāʾ, and found the people there worshipping idols. He enquired about it. They said: "These are the Lords, we have made them in the images of the celestial deities and human sages; we seek help from them and we get help; we pray to them for rain and we get rain." ʿAmr requested them to give him one of the idols; they gave him the Hubal. He brought it to Mecca and putting it on the Kaʿbah, he invited the Meccans to worship it. He also had with him Asāf and Nāʾilah in the image of a couple; he called people to them too in order to come nearer to God through them. This has been written by al-Shahristānī in his al-Milal wa al-niḥal, as well as by others. It is very interesting to see that the Qur'an uses names of some idols of Arabia in the story of Noah, where it quotes his complaint against his people: *And they say: By no means leave your gods, nor leave Wadd, nor Suwāʿ; nor Yaghūth, and Yaʿūq and Nasr* (71:23). (Auth.)

nearer to the People of the Book (who lived in Palestine and its neighborhood), and it was easier for the Jews and the Christians to adopt those people's beliefs and rituals, and the influencing factors were more conducive to it.

Therefore the unbelievers of earlier times (whose ideas concerning sonship of God, the People of the Book imitated) referred to by the Qur'an were the ancient idolaters of India and China, as well as those of Rome, Greece and North Africa. The history shows close resemblance of such Jewish and Christians beliefs with the myths of those nations—like sonship, fathership, trinity, as well as the stories of crucifixion and atonement etc. These are the historical facts to which the Qur'an has drawn our attention.

Similarly, the following verse points to this historical fact: *Say: O People of the Book! be not unduly immoderate in your religion, and do not follow the low desires of the people who went astray before and led many astray and went astray from the right path* (5:77). This verse shows that their immoderation in religion, their excessive love of some creatures which led them to raise them to godhead, had come to them from some previous nations who had gone astray before them, and in whose footsteps the Jews and the Christians were following.

The phrase: *the people who went astray before,* does not refer to their scholars or monks. The phrase is unrestricted and unconditional; it does not say, 'the people among you'. or 'led many among you astray'. Nor does it point to the Arabs of the days of ignorance—as we have explained earlier.

Moreover, it describes those people as having led many people astray; in other words, they were leaders of falsehood, whose words were listened to and whose directions were followed. Arabs did not have such a position in those days; they were just a small group of unlettered people, and did not have any knowledge, civilization and development in which—or because of which—other people could follow them. But the case of Iran, Rome and India etc., was different; they were highly civilized and developed nations.

Clearly the verse points to the idol-worshippers of China, India and the western countries, as we have explained.

Which Book the People of the Book Belong to? What is its Condition?

Although traditions count the Zoroastrians among the People of the Book

(and it means they must have had a special Book of their own, or should have belonged to one of the Books mentioned by the Qur'an, for example, the Book of Noah, the Scripture of Abraham, Torah of Moses, Injīl of Jesus and Psalms of David), but the Qur'an does not make any reference to them, nor does it mention any book of theirs; the Avastha which they have is not mentioned in the Qur'an at all, and they do not acknowledge any of the other Books.

When the Qur'an uses the term, *the People of the Book,* it means the Jews and the Christians, because of the Books which God had revealed to them.

The Jewish Scripture contains 35[1] Books: five are together called the Torah of Moses[2]; twelve are called the Kings[3]; then there are the Books of Job and Psalms of David; then come three Books of Solomon[4]; and lastly seventeen Books called the Prophets[5].

The Qur'an has not mentioned any of them except the Torah of Moses and the Psalms of David.

The Christians' Scriptures are as follows: The four Gospels (of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John); the Acts of the Apostles, and several Epistles[6], and lastly the Revelation of John.

The Qur'an does not mention any of these Christians' Books. But it says that there was a Divine Book revealed to Jesus son of Mary, which was named Injīl; it was a single Book, not many. Although the Christians do not know it, nor do they acknowledge its existence, there are sentences in the writings of their leaders which contain admission that Jesus did

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1 The Hebrew Old Testament contains 39 Books, as the list given by the author himself shows. Roman Catholic Church follows the Greek O. T. which includes some more books and passages. (Trans.)

2 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. (Auth.)

3 Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. (Auth.)

4 Proverbs, Ecclesiastics and Song of Solomon. (Auth.)

5 Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. (Auth.)

6 There are fourteen Epistles of Paul, one of James, two of Peter, three of John and one of Jude. (Auth.)

have a Book, Injīl by name[1].

Nevertheless, the Qur'an gives a hint that a portion of genuine Torah is still preserved in the Scriptures of the Jews, as is a part of genuine Injīl still extant in the Scriptures of the Christians. God says: *And how do they make you a judge and they have the Torah wherein is Allah's judgment?* (5:43); *And of those who say: We are Christians , We did take their covenant, but they forgot a portion of what they were admonished with …* (5:14). Both verses clearly imply what we have said.

Judaism and Christianity from Historical Point of View[2]

The History of the Present Torah:

The Israelites were descendants of Israel, that is, Jacob. In the beginning

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1 Paul writes to Gelatians: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ." (Gal., 1:6–7)

al-Najjār has given in his *Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, this and similar other quotations from the Epistles of Paul to prove that there was there a book—other than the four Gospels—which was called the Injil of the Messiah. (Auth.)

2 The author in this section has given a lot of references from the Christian and western writers. He had to rely on Arabic translations of the English or other languages, given in *Tafsīr al-Manār* (ed., Rashīd Riḍā, Egypt, 4th ed., 1380/1961, vol. 6, pp.31–36 and 88–92), and some other books and Encyclopaedias. I tried to get hold of original sources, so that in my translation I could include those quotations in their original wordings—it would have been odd to retranslate into English an English passage through its Arabic rendering. Unfortunately oriental authors generally do not give the original spellings of the names of western writers or their work, nor do they put vowels on them to help in pronunciation. To compound the difficulty, there were some printing mistakes in *al-Manār* which were faithfully copied in *al-Mīzān.* For example, Anacalypsis of Higgins appears as al-Anglo-Saxon in Arabic, and Monier Williams has become Morifore Lims!

After spending more than a month in various sections of the British Library, London, I was able to get many sources—and then it transpired that a large portion of quotations given in *al-Manār* was not taken directly from the original books, but from *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions* (by Doane, Thomas William).

There are still some names which I could not ascertain. While writing such a name in English I have given first the Arabic rendering, then its English

they lived a nomadic tribal life; then the Pharaohs brought them to Egypt, where they treated them as captive slaves. This continued until God delivered them through Moses from the Pharaoh and his deeds. During Moses' time they followed the line of their Leader, that is, Moses, and thereafter Yūshaᶜ (Joshua). For sometime thereafter their affairs were in the hands of the judges like Ehud and Gideon etc. Then began the era of the Kings; the first of the Kings was Saul (of the Qur'an); and then came David and Solomon.

After Solomon the Kingdom was divided[1], and their power weakened. Still there came on throne more than thirty Kings like Rehoboam, Abijam, Jeroboam, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and others.

The division continued to sap the nation's strength until they were vanquished by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, who subdued Jerusalem, that is, Bayt al-Maqdis around 600 B.C. Later the Jews revolted; so he sent his army which besieged them, and on reconquering the city, ransacked it, plundering the King's treasures as well as those of the Temple. The Babylonians gathered the Jews and took about ten thousand souls—wealthy people, strong youths and artisans—in captivity to Babylonia, leaving only weak persons and beggars in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah (the last Israelite King) to govern them as his vassal.

Ten years passed, Zedekiah gathered some strength and established some contact with the Pharaoh of the time. Then he revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. This enraged the latter who himself led his army against the Jews and besieged their towns. They fortified themselves and the siege continued for about one and a half year; the besieged population faced famine and epidemic. Still the siege continued until Nebuchadnezzer conquered all the forts in the year 586 B.C.; he massacred the Jews, turned their towns into ruins, demolished the Temple and destroyed every religious symbol. When he left, the Temple was only a mound of dust and rubble; and the Torah and the Ark in which it was kept were irretrievably lost.

The things continued like that for about fifty years. The Jews were captives in Babylonia; their Book (Torah) was lost and there was nowhere any trace of it; their Temple was a ruin, their towns middens of rubble.

Then Cyrus, the Persian King, appeared on the scene. He vanquished

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transliteration followed by question mark within brackets (?). (Trans.)

1 There appeared two Kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. (Trans.)

Babylonians, conquered Babylonia and stayed there for a short time. He released the Israelite captives, and appointed Ezra as their leader; Ezra was authorized by him to rewrite the Torah for them, rebuild their Temple and re-establish their original rites and rituals. Ezra led the Israelites back to Jerusalem in 457 B.C.[1] . Thereafter he compiled and edited the books attributed to Moses—and it is what is known today as the Torah.[2]

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1 Modern scholars think that it happened in 397 B.C. (Trans.)

2 Vide *Qāmūs al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas* (Dictionary of the Bible) by Mr. Hawks (?), and other books of history. (Auth.)
The first five books of Old Testament, commonly known as the Torah, are also called Pentateuch. In the 18th Century, some Christian scholars started what is now known as the "Higher Criticism". Their views are now accepted by a great part of Christiandom. They have proved that it contains writings of unknown number of people right up to 1000 years after the death of Moses. I append below the time table and sequence of its editing (in short) as given by Rev. W.K.L. Clarke, in his *Concise Bible Commentary* (S.P.C.K., London, 1952): He says that by the end of the 19th Century, it was generally recognized "that there are four main sources in the Pentateuch, to be assigned to the 9th, 8th, 7th and 5th or 4th Centuries (B.C.) respectively."
"The first look at the Pentateuch shows three characteristics styles illustrated by Genesis:1, Genesis:2 and Deuteronomy, and the documents marked by these styles were first to be noticed."
"The obviously early source begins in Gen. 2:4. This source is called 'J', after the J of Jehovah (pronounced Jahweh). 'J' is generally thought to have been put into written form about 850 B.C.
"Another source is 'D', so-called from the book of Deuteronomy, which was the book of law discovered in Josiah's reign. The third source is called Priestly document, P for short. A large part of P is believed to have been composed in Babylonia and brought to Jerusalem by Ezra in 397 B.C. How much of P was omitted in final compilation of Pentateuch we have no means of knowing. There was a subordinate source, known as the Code of Holiness, H for short. Opinions differ whether it was written before 586 B.C. or after the fall of Jerusalem. It is found in Lev. 17:28.
"Now comes the fourth source. After taking P, D and J from the Pentateuch a considerable amount of material remains, parallel to J, but in Genesis using Elohim for God and not Yahweh. This non-P Elohim matter begins in Gen. 20:117 … Altogether E is more mature religiously and is thought to have reached written from about 750 (B.C.)."
How were these four main sources compiled to form the Pentateuch?
"The first step was to combine J and E. This must have been done after the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. The two were combined in a document which is

If you think over these events you will see that the chain of the narrators of today's Torah is broken, and not connected up to Moses except through a single person, that is, Ezra. But first of all, we do not know who Ezra was; secondly, we do not know how much he knew of the Torah or how deep his knowledge was; thirdly, we do not know how honest and trustworthy he was; fourthly, we do not know from where he collected what he compiled as the books of the Torah; and lastly, we do not know with which authentic source he compared his collection to correct the mistakes which might have crept into the text.

This unfortunate episode has given rise to another disturbing theory. Some western scholars now deny the existence of Moses and the events related to him. They say that he is a mythical being who never existed. (The same theories have been advanced about Jesus son of Mary. But we the Muslims cannot entertain such ideas, because the Qur'an in very clear terms confirms his existence (peace be on him).

The Story of Jesus and the Gospels:

The Jews pay particular attention to their history. They have recorded main events through which they have passed. Nevertheless, if you hunt through their books and literature you will not come across any mention of Jesus son of Mary. Jewish literature throws no light on his birth or mission, nor does it say anything about his character of life story. It is silent about the miracles appearing on his hand; and does not say how his life on the earth was ended—did he die a natural death? Was he killed

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called JE.

"Then in 621 Deuteronomy was discovered, or at least a large part of it. The next stage was to put JE, and D together. This will have taken place during the exile … A perceptible amount of editing of JE took place.

"P was written in Babylonia and brought to Jerusalem by Ezra in 397 B.C. Later, editors used it as a framework and incorporated JED, thus producing the Pentateuch … in about 300 B.C."

Rev. Clarke sums it up in these words: "Probably a multitude of persons have combined to give us Genesis (etc.), covering in their lives a span of 1000 years." Even that minority of the Christian scholars which still holds fast to the theory of "Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch" has to admit that it must have been rewritten by the subsequent generations to modernize the language. This concession has to be given because "it is hardly probable that the Hebrew of Moses' day was like that of Biblical Hebrew." See the *Westminster Dictionary of Bible,* under "Pentateuch". (Trans.)

or crucified? Or, was there something else? Why this silence? Why had his affairs remained hidden from them? Or, why did they keep it hidden?

The Qur'an mentions that the Jews had falsely accused Mary and calumniated her regarding the birth of Jesus, and that they claimed to have killed Jesus. God says: *And for their unbelief and for their having uttered against Mary a grievous calumny. And their saying: Surely we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of Allah ; and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so*; *and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they killed him not for sure* (4:156–157).

Was this claim of theirs based on some oral tradition which was never put to writing? Every nation does have such folklores—some facts, some myths—which should not be taken seriously unless they are based on correct, reliable sources.

Or, was it that they heard the Christians talking about the Messiah and his birth and mission; and taking the story from them they accused Mary of indecency and claimed to having killed the Messiah? No definite answers can be found to these questions. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, it clearly ascribes to them only the claim of killing, not of crucifying; then it says that they are in confusion and there is a difference of opinion among them about the whole matter.

As for the Christians, the story of the Messiah is based on their Scriptures, that is, the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; as well as the Acts of the Apostles (by Luke) and several Epistles of Paul, Peter, Jacob, John and Jude. Authenticity of all depends on genuineness of the four Gospels; therefore let us have a look at them.

The Gospel of Matthew: It is the first and earliest of the Gospels so far as compilation and publication is concerned. Some say that it was written in 38 C.E.; others that it was compiled between 50 and 60 C. E.[1] In any case, it was written after the Messiah.

The ancient and modern Christian scholars are of the opinion that it was originally written in Hebrew; and then translated into Greek and other languages. But the original Hebrew version is lost; and as for the translation, its condition (correctness, etc.) cannot be verified, nor is it

1 Hawks (?), Dictionary of Bible, under "Matthew". (Auth.) This Book is referred to hereafter as *Dic. of Bib.* (Trans.)

known who had translated it.[1]

The Gospel of Marks: Marks was a disciple of St. Peter; he was not one of the twelve disciples of the Christ. It is often said that he wrote his Gospel on Peter's orders, and that he did not believe in divinity of the Christ.[2] Accordingly some people say that he had written his Gospel for the tribes and villagers, and that was why he introduced Christ as a messenger of God who brought and conveyed the shariah of God.[3] He wrote this Book in 61 C.E.

The Gospel of Luke: Luke was neither one of the disciples nor had he seen Christ. He learnt Christianity from Paul. Paul was a Jew who hated the Christians and Christianity; he oppressed those who believed in Christ and used to hinder their activities and disturb their affairs. Then all of a sudden he came to them and claimed that he had been seized by an epileptic fit in course of which Christ appeared to him, and admonished him for his bad treatment of the Christians; according to his claim, he believed in Christ in the same trance and Christ in the same vision appointed him as his apostle to propagate the Christ's Gospel.

It was St. Paul who laid the foundation of Christianity, as it is today.[4] He taught that mere believing in the Christ was enough for salvation; there was no need of acting on it. Accordingly, he allowed them to eat pork and dead animals; and forbade circumcision and a lot of the shariah of the Torah. This was in spite of the fact that Injīl was revealed just as a verifier of the Torah, and had made lawful only a few things which were forbidden in Torah.[5] Jesus had come to re-establish the shariah of Torah, and to bring the deviators and transgressors back to it; he had not come to

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1 Vide *Mīzān al-ḥaqq*; Dic. of Bib., too admits it with some reluctance. (Auth.)

2 ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār, *Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, (p.400, 2nd ed., Cairo, n.d.), quoting from Baṭrus Qarmāj (?) *Marūj al-akhbār fi tarājim al-abrār* (Beirut, 1880). (Auth.)

3 As described in the Dic. of Bib. It says: "Although the early fathers unanimously say that St. Mark had written his Gospel in Rome and that it was published after the deaths of Sts. Peter and Paul, but this is not very credible, because it appears from his Gospel that he had written it for the tribes and villagers, not for the (civilized) people leaving in cities—and especially Rome." Ponder on this statement. (Auth.)

4 Vide *Dic. of Bib.*, under the heading "Paul". (Auth.)

5 See the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Epistles of St. Paul*. (Auth.)

abrogate the shariah or to base the eternal felicity on a belief devoid of action.

Luke wrote his Gospel after that of Marks, and it was after the deaths of Sts. Peter and Paul. Some people have firmly opined that the Gospel of Luke is not a revelation like other Gospels, as may be understood from his Prologue.[1]

The Gospel of John: Many Christians say that the John who wrote it was John son of Zebedee, the fisher, one of the twelve disciples, and the

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1 Luke begins his Gospel with these words:
"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." (Luke, 1:1–3)
It clearly shows that it is a book based on human understanding, not on revelation. This view has also been attributed to Mr. Cadell (?) in the booklet, *Revelation.* St. Jerome has said that some early Fathers had doubts about the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, and that they were missing from the version of the Marcionites*. Eichhorn** declares in his book (p.95) that verses 43 to 47 of the 2nd chapter of the Luke's Gospel are an interpolation. Also he says on p. 61 of his book: "Fictitious narratives have been mixed up in description of miracles mentioned by Luke; and the writer has included them as poetic exaggeration. But it is difficult at this point of time to separate truth from falsehood." And al-Najjār quotes in *Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (p. 401) the saying of Mr. Clemesious (?) that: Matthew and Mark differ in their narration; and when they identify, their report would be given preference over that of Luke.(Auth.)
*Marcionites, followers of Marcion (d. cir. 160), who rejected the Law and believed in Gospel of Love only. He rejected the Old Testament, and believed that the twelve Apostles and the Evangelists were blind to this reality. and only St. Paul understood it. For them the only Canonical Scriptures were ten of the fourteen Epistles of Paul. (Trans.)
**Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried (1752–1827) was Biblical scholars and orientalist. He was among the first to make comparison between the Biblical Books and other Semitic languages; and one of the earliest critics who laid foundation of the High Criticism of the Bible. (Trans.)

one whom the Christ loved[1]. They say that as Cerinthus[2] and Ebionites[3] and their followers thought that the Christ was nothing more than a created human being whose existence did not precede his mother's existence, the bishops of Asia and others visited John in 96 C.E. and urged him to write what others had not written in their Gospels so that he could particularly describe the divinity of the Christ. John had to comply with their request and wrote this Gospel[4].

There is a difference of opinion when it was written: Some say, in 65 C.E., some say, in 96 C.E., and others say, in 98 C.E.

Another group says that it was not written by John the disciple: Some say that it is the work of a student of Alexanderia[5]; others say that this Gospel as well as the Epistles of John were authored in the beginning of the 2nd Century by an unknown person who attributed them to John so that the writings might gain credence in people's eyes[6] ; yet others think that the Gospel of John originally contained twenty chapters and after his death the Church of Ephesus added the twenty-first[7].

This is then the condition of the four Gospels. What is certain is that

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1 Vide *Dic. of Bib.*, under John. (Auth.)

2 Cerinthus, who flourished around 100 C.E., was a Gnostic "heretic". Among other things, he taught that Jesus began his earthly life as a mere man; at his baptism 'the Christ', a "higher divine power," descended on him, only to depart from him again before the crucifixion. He seems to have had connections both with the Ebionites and Alexandrine Gnosticism. (Trans.)

3 Ebionites, literally 'poor men', were a sect of Jewish Christians which flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era. Apparently, two of their principle tenets were: (i) belief in humanity of the Person of Christ, to the effect, for example, that Jesus was the human son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove lighted on him at his baptism; and (ii) emphasis on the binding character of the Mosaic Law. (Trans.)

4 al-Najjār, Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, quoting Jirjīs Zuwayn al-Futūḥī of Lebnon. (Auth.)

5 al-Najjār, op. cit., quoting from the *Catholic Herald,* 1844, vol.7, p. 205 quoting Ostadelane (?); also *Dic. of Bib.* points to it, under 'John'. (Trans.)

6 It is the view of Bretschneider, as al-Najjār has written in his *Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, quoting from al-Fārūq.,vol. 1. (Auth.)
Bretschneider, Karl Gottlieb (1776–1848) had written a treatise on the Gospel of John in 1820. (Trans.)

7 *ibid.* (Auth.)

all these narrations depend on seven persons: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul and Jude; and they rely on the four Gospels, which in their turn rely on the earliest one, that is, the Gospel of Matthew. And we have already seen that it is a translation whose original is lost; nobody knows who had translated it. What was the theme and teaching of the original? Did it teach messengership of Christ? Or, his divinity?[1]

The present Gospels show that there had appeared among the Children of Israel a man named Jesus son of Joseph, the carpenter; he began calling towards God; he claimed that he was a son of God, born without agency of a human father, and that his Father had sent him to atone for the sin of the people through being killed by crucifixion; that he gave life to the dead, healed the blind and the lepers, and restored the possessed to health by removing devil from them; that there were twelve disciples with him, one of them being Matthew the Evangelist; he blessed them and sent them to propagate his religion …

This is the gist of the Christianity and its mission—in spite of its

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1 Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew is held to be the oldest of the four. But modern scholars commonly hold that it is Mark which is the oldest. There occurs a large amount of common subject matter in the three Synoptic Gospels (that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke) and often similar phrasing in more than one Gospel. That this parallelism, of varying degree of closeness, must be accounted for by their literary interdependence is nowadays almost universally held by scholars. There is also wide, but less complete, agreement (1) that Mark is the earliest of the three Gospels and was used as a framework by both Matthew and Luke; (2) that the non-Marcan material common to Matthew and Luke is derived from a single lost source known to critics as 'Q' (from German 'Quelle' = source); and (3) that the authors of Matthew and Luke used further sources for the matter peculiar to them. In view of the fact that Matthew drew extensively on Mark, which he expanded with the aid of 'Q', the early tradition that the Gospel was written in Hebrew is untenable. The chief objection to its ascription to St. Matthew is the unlikelihood that an Apostle, who was an eye-witness of the events, would have taken as his principal source of the work of St. Mark, whose material is in any case secondhand. Vide *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 2nd ed., 1974 (OUP). See laso the *Concise Bible Commentary* (by Rev. W. K. L. Clark; pub. by S. P. C. K., London, 1952) and the *Westminster Dictionary of Bible.*

It is not only the Gospel of Matthew whose author is unknown; the Gospel of John suffers the same fate. Many scholars believe that its author was some disciple and follower of the Apostle John the son of Zebedee. "His name is either unknown to us, or more likely, was John the Presbyter, or Elder." (Trans.)

having been spread to every corner of the world. It all boils down to a report by one person whose name and particulars are unknown, whose identity and character is shrouded in obscurity.

This curious weakness just in the initial stage has compelled some independent minds of Europe to claim that Christ, Jesus son of Mary, is a mythical being, invented by some religious movements for or against the government of the time. This view has been strengthened by another mythical character which it resembles in every detail, and that is the character of Krishna: The idol-worshippers of India believe that Krishna was the son of God, who descended to earth from his divine abode, and atoned for the people by being crucified in order to deliver them from their sins and mistakes. It is the same belief which the Christians have about Christ Jesus. (Details are given below.)

Other scholars have found it necessary to say that there were in fact two Christs, one not crucified, the other crucified, who came more than five centuries after the former.

The Christians Era (which at the time of writing is 1956 C.E.) does not correspond with any of the above-mentioned two dates. The former (not crucified) Christ had preceded it by more than two hundred and fifty years (and lived for sixty years), while the latter (crucified) Christ came more than two hundred and ninety years after the beginning of the said Era (and lived for about thirty-three years)[1].

However, difference of the Christians Era with the actual birth-date of Christ is a fact which is not denied even by the Christians—and it is a historical disjunction[2].

Moreover, there are some other matters which give rise to doubts and mistrust. They have written that during the first two centuries many more Gospels, including the four now used, were written—their number exceeded a hundred. Then the Church banned all of them except the four which were canonized because they corresponded with the views of the

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1 This subject has been described in detail by the scholar Behrūz, in a book he recently wrote on the Prophetic foretelling. I hope to quote some parts of it at the end of the Commentary of Chapter Four "The Women". What is certain (and with which we are concerned here) is the incorrectness of the Christians Era. (Auth.)

2 Vide *the Dic. of Bib.*, under Christ. (Auth.)

Church[1].

Among the discarded ones was the *Gospel of Barnabas,* a copy of which was found years ago, and which has been translated into Arabic and Persian. The story of Christ, Jesus son of Mary, as given in this Gospel, generally corresponds with that given in the Qur'an[2].

Strangely enough, even the non-Jewish historical records are silent

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1 Celsus, the 2nd Century's philosopher, admonished the Christians, in his book, *Logos Alethes* (True Word) for their manipulations of the Gospels—that they erase by tomorrow what they had written yesterday. (He wrote this book about 176–180 C.E. It was the first notable polemic against Christianity. The book itself has perished, but fragments of high interest occur as quotations in Origen's *Contra Celsum.*)* In 384, Pope Damasus ordered a new Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments to be prepared for the Church—the Emperor Theodosius had tired of the polemics and controversies raging among the bishops. That translation, called Vulgate, was completed; it covered only the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The editors wrote: "After comparing various old Greek copies, we edited them, that is, we discarded what was contradictory, and left the remaining parts as they were." That version was confirmed by the Trent Council held in 1546, that is, some eleven centuries later. In 1590, Pope Sixtus V declared it to contain errors and mistakes, and ordered a new version to be published. Pope Clement VIII found fault with the second version too, and ordered in 1592 publication of a new revised version—which is used by the Catholic Church today. (*Tafsīr al-Jawāhir,* 2nd ed., vol. 2, p.121) (Auth.)

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* Note: The material given within the brackets, here and elsewhere in the text or within the Author's Notes, has been added by the Translator for deeper understanding or greater clarity. (Trans.)

2 This Gospel in Italian had been discovered sometime ago. Dr. Khalīl Saʿādah of Egypt translated it into Arabic, and the well-known scholar Sardār Kābūli, into Persian in Iran. (Auth.)

The said manuscript was found in the Imperial Library, Vienna. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg edited the Italian text and translated it into English which was published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1907. It was from that version that the above-mentioned Arabic version was prepared. Strange as it may seem, now only two copies of the 1907 edition are known to exist, one in the British Library, London, and the other in the Library of Congress, Washington. Within the last two decades Begum Aisha Bawany Waqf, Karachi, has printed it several times and distributed it widely throughout the Muslim World.

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Understandably, the Christians, including the translators (Lonsdale and Laura Ragg) themselves claim that the Vienna manuscript is spurious, not genuine. Their arguments deserve careful consideration. (Trans.)

about what the Gospels present as the Christ's mission—sonship, atonement and other related matters. The famous American historian, Hendrick Willem Van Loon has given in his book, *Story of Mankind,* a letter of a Roman physician, Aesculapius Cultellus, which he wrote in 62 A.D. to his nephew, Gladius Ensa, who was a soldier in Syria[1]. In that letter, he says:

> A few days ago I was called in to prescribe for a sick man named Paul. He appeared to be a Roman citizen of Jewish parentage, well educated and of agreeable manners …
>
> A friend of mine … tells me that he heard something about him in Ephesus where he was preaching sermons about a strange new god. I asked my patient if this were true Paul answered me that the kingdom of which he had spoken was not of this world and he added many strange utterances which I did not understand … His personality made a great impression upon me and I was sorry to hear that he was killed on the Ostian Road a few days ago. Therefore I am writing this letter to you. When next you visit Jerusalem, I want you to find out something about my friend Paul and the strange Jewish prophet, who seems to have been his teacher. I would like to know the truth about all these rumors …
>
> Six weeks later, Gladius Ensa, the nephew, (a captain of the VII Gallic Infantry), answered as follows:
>
> (I received your letter and I have obeyed your order. Two weeks ago our brigade was sent to Jarusalem)
>
> I have talked with most of the older men in this city but few have been able to give me any definite information.[2]
>
> A few days ago a peddler came to the camp. I bought some of his olive and I asked him whether he had ever heard of the famous Messiah who was killed when he was young. He said that he remembered it very clearly.… He gave me the address of one Joseph, who had been a personal friend of the Messiah and told me that I had better go and see him if I wanted to know more.
>
> This morning I went to call on Joseph. He was quite an old man. He had been a fisherman on one of the freshwater lakes. His

1 It appears, in the book, under the heading: "The Story of Joshua of Nazareth, whom the Greeks called Jesus." I have copied Verbatim a part of the physician's letter which the author of *al-Mīzān* has given only a gist of it. (Trans.)

2 This, when it was 62 C.E., and they were older men! Strange, isn't it? (Auth.)

memory was clear, and from him at last I got a fairly definite account of what had happened during the troublesome days before I was born.

Tiberius, our great and glorious emperor, was on the throne, and an officer of the name of Pontius Pilatus was governor of Judaea and Samaria … In the year 783 or 784 (Joseph had forgotten when) Pilatus was called to Jerusalem on account of a riot. A certain young man (the son of a carpenter of Nazareth) was said to be planning a revolution against the Roman government. Strangely enough our own intelligence officers, who are usually well informed, appear to have heard nothing about it, and when they investigated the matter they reported that the carpenter was an excellent citizen and that there was no reason to proceed against him. But the old-fashioned leaders of the Jewish faith, according to Joseph, were much upset. They greatly disliked his popularity with the masses of the poorer Hebrews. The "Nazarene" (so they told Pilatus) had publicly claimed that a Greek or a Roman or even a Palestinian, who tried to live a decent and honorable life, was quite as good as a Jew who spent his days in studying the ancient laws of Moses. Pilatus does not seem to have been impressed by this argument, but when the crowds around the temple threatened to lynch Jesus, and kill all his followers, he decided to take the carpenter into custody to save his life.

He does not appear to have understood the real nature of the quarrel. Whenever he asked the Jewish priests to explain their grievances, they shouted "heresy" and "treason" and got terribly excited. Finally, so Joseph told me, Pilatus sent for Joshua (that was the name of the Nazarene, but the Greeks who live in this part of the world always refer to him as Jesus) to examine him personally. He talked to him for several hours. He asked him about the "dangerous doctrines" which he was said to have preached on the shores of the sea of Galilee. But Jesus answered that he never referred to politics. He was not so much interested in the bodies of men as in Man's soul. He wanted all people to regard their neighbors as their brothers and to love one single God, who was the father of all living beings.

Pilatus, who seems to have been well versed in the doctrines of

> the Stoics and the other Greek philosophers, does not appear to have discovered anything seditious in the talk of Jesus. According to my informant he made another attempt to save the life of the kindly prophet. He kept putting the execution off. Meanwhile the Jewish people, lashed into fury by their priests, got frantic with rage. There had been many riots in Jerusalem before this and there were only a few Roman soldiers within calling distance. Reports were being sent to the Roman authorities in Caesarea that Pilatus had "fallen a victim to the teachings of the Nazarene". Petitions were being circulated all through the city to have Pilatus recalled, because he was an enemy of the Emperor. You know that our governors have strict instructions to avoid an open break with their foreign subjects. To save the country from civil war, Pilatus finally sacrificed his prisoner, Joshua, who behaved with great dignity and who forgave all those who hated him. He was crucified amidst the howls and the laughter of the Jerusalem mob.
>
> That is what Joseph told me, with tears running down his old cheeks. I gave him a gold piece when I left him, but he refused it and asked me to hand it to one poorer than himself. I also asked him about your friend Paul. He had known him slightly. He seems to have been a tent maker, who gave up his profession that he might preach the words of a loving and forgiving God, Who was so very different from that Jehovah of whom the Jewish priests are telling us all the time. Afterwards, Paul appears to have travelled much in Asia Minor and in Greece, telling the slaves that they were children of one loving Father and that happiness awaits all, both rich and poor, who have tried to live honest lives and have done good to those who were suffering and miserable … [1]

This is the main theme of this letter as far as the subject of our present discussion is concerned.

On pondering on this letter one may easily understand which direction Christianity had taken—among the Israelites—soon after Jesus. Clearly it was a prophetic mission of a messenger sent by God—not a claim of divinity calling people to believe that God had taken a human form and descended to the earth to deliver mankind by offering an atonement for

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1 Van Loon, Hendrick Willem: The Story of Mankind, London, 1922, pp. 119–123. (Trans.)

their sins.

Then some disciples of Jesus and/or those claiming connection with him, like Paul, and the disciples of disciples journeyed—after the said crucifixion—to various regions of the world, like India, Africa, Rome, etc., and spread the message of Christianity. But soon after that, in the wake of those missionary activities, they differed among themselves about the basic teachings of the new religion. Was Christ a God? Was belief in Christ enough for salvation without any need of following the Mosaic Law? Was the religion of the Gospel an independent one which had abrogated the Mosaic Law? Or, was it a part of the Mosaic religion sent merely to perfect it? In this way they divided into various sects and groups.[1]

We should keep in mind the fact that all the nations where Christianity was propagated in the beginning—like Rome and India, etc. were at that time idol-worshippers, the Sabaeans, the Hindus or the Buddhists, etc. Also there was some mystic influence on one side and the hold of Brahmanic philosophy on the other. All these systems and religions believed to a great extent in incarnation and appearance of gods and deities in human form. Also the beliefs of trinity in unity, coming down of a deity in human body, and its suffering and being crucified[2] to atone sins of mankind was very much prevalent among ancient idol-worshippers of India, China, Egypt, Chaledonia, Assyria and Iran. The same was the situation among ancient western idolators like Romans, Scandinavians and others—as may be seen

1 It is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul; also it is admitted by the Christians themselves. (Auth.)

2 Killing by crucifixion is one of the oldest methods. They used to crucify the hardest criminals who had committed very heinous crimes, because crucifixion was the most torturous way of killing and left the blackest stigma on the name of the one so executed. The cross was made by joining two wooden logs which formed angles with each other (like T, t or X) as we see the crosses nowadays; it was done in a way that a man could be placed on it. The criminal was attached to it with outstretched hands and arms; his palms were fixed on the horizontal piece with nails, and the legs nailed to the upright post—sometimes they were tied to it and not nailed. Then the cross was erected vertically in the earth, leaving a space of about a yard between the earth and the victim's feet. He was left on the cross for a day or more; then his legs were broken and he was killed on the cross, or was brought down from the cross and then killed. The victim, before being put on cross, was tortured, whipped or mutilated. It was an indelible disgrace for a family or clan if one of them was crucified. (Auth.)

in the books written about ancient religions and beliefs.

Doane writes in his *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions:*

> "If we return to India we shall find that one of the most prominent features in the Indian theology is the doctrine of a divine triad, governing all things. This triad is called *Tri-murti*—from the Sanscrit (*sic.*) word *tri* (three) and *murti* (form)—and consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. It is an inseparable unity, though three in form."[1]

Then he goes on to explain that Brahma is the Father; Vishnu, the Son; and Siva, the Holy Spirit.[2]

Then he writes (in the footnote) about Vishnu, the Son that he is "the Lord and Saviour Chrishna[3]. The Supreme Spirit, in order to preserve the world, produced Vishnu who came upon earth, for this purpose, in the form of Chrishna. He was believed to be an incarnation of the Supreme Being, one of the persons of their holy and mysterious trinity, to use their language, 'The Lord and Saviour—three persons and one god.' "[4]

He writes that like the Christians, the Hindus too use the dove for the emblem of the third person of their trinity.[5]

(Doane further writes:)

> "Mr. Faber, in his *Origin of Heathen Idolatry,* says: 'Among the Hindoos, we have the Triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva; so, among the votaries of Buddha, we find the self-triplicated Buddha declared to be the same as the Hindoo Trimurti. Among the Buddhist sect of the Jainists (*sic.*), we have the triple jiva, in whom the Trimurti is similarly declared to be incarnated.' "[6]

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1 Doane, Thomas William: *Bible Myths and their Parallels* in other Religions; being a comparison of the Old and New Testament myths and miracles with those of heathen nations of antiquity, considering also their origin and meaning; New York, 1883, p. 369. (Trans.)

2 *ibid.* (Trans.)

3 The author of *al-Mīzān*, like many others, opines that the word 'Crishna' has been taken in European languages as Christ, to mean the Anointed Savior. (Trans.)

4 *ibid.*, p.370. (Trans.)

5 *ibid.*, footnote no. 4. (Trans.)

6 *ibid.*, p. 371. (Trans.)

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(Doane further quotes from the same book of Mr. Faber:)

"Among the Chinese, who worship Buddha under the name of *Fo,* we find this God mysteriously multiplied into *three persons* …[1]

Doane now turns to Egypt:

"The priests of Memphis, in Egypt, explained this mystery to the novice, by intimating that the premier (first) *monad* created the *dyad,* who engendered the *triad,* and that it is this *triad* which shines through nature.

"Thulis, a great monarch, who at one time reigned over all Egypt, and who was in the habit of consulting the oracle of Serapis, is said to have addressed the oracle in these words:

" 'Tell me if ever there was before one greater than I, or will ever be one greater than me?'

"The oracle answered thus:

" 'First *God,* afterward the *Word,* and with them the *Holy Spirit,* all these are of the same nature, and make but *one* whole, of which the power is eternal. Go away quickly, *mortal,* thou who hast but an uncertain life.' "[2]

Doane quotes Bonwick:

"Some persons are prepared to admit that the most astonishing development of the old religion of Egypt was in relation to the *Logos* or Divine *Word,* by whom all things were made, and who, though from God, was God."[3]

It should be noted that these are the very words with which the Gospel of St. John begins.[4]

Doane quotes from Higgins *Anacalypsis* that:

Mithras, the Mediator, and Saviour of the Persians, was called

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1 *ibid*., p.372. (Trans.)

2 *ibid*., p.373, quoting from Higgins, Godfrey: Anacalypsis: *An Enquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions*; London, vol. 2, p. 14. (Trans.)

3 ibid., quoting Bonwick, James: *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*; London, 1878; p.402. (Trans.)

4 Doane says on p.375: "The celebrated passage: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' is a fragment of some Pagan treatise on the Platonic philosophy, evidently written by Irenaeus." And he writes a footnote on it: "The first that we know of this Gospel (that is, John) for certain is during the time of Irenaeus, the great, Christian forger." (Trans.)

the *Logos.*[1]

Doane has proved that the ancient pagans used to believe in one god with three persons. He has extensively shown that the pagan belief of trinity in unity was prevalent among the Greeks, Romans, Finns, Scandinavians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Phoenicians.[2] (On the question of atonement), he writes:

> "The idea of expiation by the sacrifice of a *god* was to be found among the Hindoos even in *Vedic* times."[3]

Then giving the references, he, *inter alia,* writes:

> "Crishna, the virgin-born, "the Divine Vishnu himself'[4], 'he who is without beginning, middle or end'[5], being moved 'to relieve the earth of her load'[6], came upon earth and redeemed man by his *suffering*—to save him."[7]
>
> "In the earlier copies of Moor's, *Hindu Pantheon,* is to be seen representations of Chrishna (as *Wittoba*) with marks of holes in both feet, and in others, of holes in the hands. (In Figures 4 and 5 of Plate II (Moor's work) the figures have *nail-holes in both feet.* Figure 6 has a *round hole in the side*;) to his collar or shirt hangs the emblem of a *heart* (which we often see in pictures of Christ Jesus) … Instead of the *crown of thorns* usually put on the head of the Christians Saviour, it (Figure 7) has the turreted coronet of the Ephesian Diana …"[8]

Doane quotes Huc that among the Hindus, *the idea of redemption by a divine incarnation,* who came into the world for the express purpose of

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1 *ibid*., p.373, footnote no. 5, quoting Higgins: Anacalypsis, vol. 2, p. 102. (Trans.)

2 *ibid*. Vide his chapter, "The Trinity," pp. 368–383, where he mentions some other ancient nations too, having such beliefs. (Trans.)

3 *ibid*., p.181. (Trans.)

4 Vishnu Purana, *A System of Hindoo Mythology and Tradition*, translated by H.H. Wilson; London, 1840; p. 440. (Trans.)

5 *ibid*. (Trans.)

6 *ibid.* (Trans.)

7 Doane, op. cit. p. 184. (Trans.)

8 *ibid*., p.185, quoting Edward Moor: Plates Illustrating the Hindu Pantheon; London, 1816; and Higgins: Anacalypsis, vol. 2. (Trans.)

redeeming mankind, was 'general and popular.'[1]

> "A sense of original corruption," says Professor Monier Williams, seems to be felt by all classes of Hindoos, as indicated by the following prayer used after the *Gayatri* by some Vaishnavas.
>
> " ' "I am sinful, I commit sin, my nature is sinful, *I am conceived in sin.* Save me, O thou lotus-eyed Heri (Saviour), the remover of sin." ' "[2]

Rev. Geo. W. Cox remarks on two opposite conceptions of Krishna's character, in one of which he is described "As a self sacrificing and unselfish hero," who is, "filled with divine wisdom and love, who offers up a sacrifice which he alone can make."[3]

> "P. Andrada la Crozius, one of the first Europeans who went to Nepal and Thibet (*sic.*), in speaking of the god whom they worshipped there—*Indra*—tells us that they said *he spilt his blood for the salvation of the human race,* and that he was pierced through the body with nails. He further says that, although they do not say he suffered the penalty of the cross, yet they find, nevertheless, figures of it in their books."[4]
>
> "The monk Georgius, in his *Tibetinum Alphabetum* (p. 203), has given plates of a *crucified god,* who was worshipped in Nepal He calls it the god *Indra.*" (Figure 9 of these plates) shows a cross having arms of equal length fixed much high on the stem; Thus the head portion is shorter and the body portion longer—no one would think that it represented a man except for the image of face on it.[5]

What the Buddhists narrate about Buddha fits even more perfectly on what the Christians believe about Jesus Christ. The Buddhists call Buddha, the Messiah, the Only Begotten, the Saviour of the World, the God who sacrificed his life to wash away the offences of mankind, and thereby to

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1 *ibid.*, quoting M. l'Abbe Huc: Travels (*Christianity in China, Tartary and Thibet*); London, 1857, vol. 1, pp. 326–327. (Trans.)

2 *ibid.*, quoting Monier Williams: Hinduism, London, 1877, p. 214. (Trans.)

3 Cox, George William, *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*; London, 1870, vol. 2, p. 132. (Trans.)

4 Doane, op. cit., pp. 187–188, quoting Higgins: op. cit., p.118. (Trans.)

5 *ibid.*, p. 187. (Trans.)

make them partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven.[1]

This subject has been explained by many orientalists, like Bell[2], Huc, Muller[3], and others[4].

This was a sample of the belief of deities taking human form, and of crucifixion and atonement as it was found in ancient religions prevalent in the nations among which Christianity was propagated in the very beginning. The new religion very much attracted the people in all these places where the Christian missionaries went. And the reason was clear: The Christian Fathers took the fundamentals of Christianity and remolded them in the molds of idolatry, and in this way got the people attracted to their call and made it easier to them to accept their teachings.

This view is strengthened when we see how Paul and others disparage the wisdom and philosophy of the philosophers, and how they look down with disdain at rational argument, declaring that the Lord God prefers the foolishness of the fools to the wisdom of the wise.

The fact is that they presented their teaching to the schools of logic and philosophy, and the intellectuals rejected it saying that there was no way of even understanding it—let alone accepting it. To overcome this difficulty, they started talking of revelation, apocalypse and vision; and claimed that they were filled of the Holy Ghost. In this, they followed the life of the ignorant mystics who claim that their way is beyond the reach of reason and intellect. Thereafter, their missionaries went to various cities and regions (as described in the *Acts of Apostles* and the history books) and propagated the Christianity. Wherever they went, the masses welcomed them. The main reason of their success—and especially within the Roman Empire—was the simmering discontent and disgruntling despair

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1 *ibid*., pp.188–189. (Trans.)

2 John Bell, New Pantheon, or Historical Dictionary of Gods, Demi-Gods, Heroes and Fabulous Personages of Antiquity … in two volumes, London, 1790. (Trans.)

3 Max Muller, *A History of Ancient Sancrit Literature*, so far as it illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmins; London, 1860. (Trans.)

4 Vide chapter XX (*The Crucifixion of Christ Jesus*) of the Doane's Book. (Trans.) The author of *al-Mīzān* writes: "The reader will find these quotations in *Tafsīr al-Manār* (vol. 6, under the Chapter of 'The Women'), various encyclopaedias and the book, *al-ʿAqāʾid al-wathaniyyah fi al-diyānat al-Naṣrāniyyah*, and others." The last named book is authored by Muhammad Ṭāhir Āfandī. (Trans.)

which had spread everywhere because of the never-ending oppression and injustice; the ruling class treated the masses as their slaves and serfs; there was a yawning gap between the lives of the rulers and the ruled, an unbridgeable chasm between the high and the low classes; the extravagant life-style of the rich was sustained by the sweat and blood of the poor and slaves. In this social structure, the Christian missionaries called the people to brotherhood, love, equality and good neighborliness; they exhorted them to discard this world and its transient painful life and to concentrate on the pure and happy life that was in heaven. It was this theme which the ruling classes—the kings and emperors—found advantageous to themselves, and they thought that it was in their interest to turn a blind eye to the missionaries' activities; as a general rule, this tacit understanding saved the new group from punishment, torture and banishment.

Their number kept increasing, and so did their power. A great multitude embraced Christianity within and outside the Roman Empire; it reached up to Africa and even India. Invariably opening of a church heralded the closure or destruction of a temple. With number and power, their attitude changed. Not only that they disregarded the resistance of the pagan leaders (as they went on undermining idol-worship), they even refused obeisance to the rulers and emperors. Their refusal to obey imperial decrees in this respect resulted in their punishment, imprisonment and even murder. Many were tortured and killed; others imprisoned or banished.

This continued until the Emperor Constantine came on throne. He accepted Christianity and recognized it as the State religion. Churches were built in Rome and throughout the empire. It was in the second half of the fourth century of Christian Era.[1]

From then on the Church of Rome became the centre of Christianity. Bishops and missionaries were sent to all regions and countries within the Roman Empire. Countless churches, monasteries and seminaries (to teach Christianity) were built.

There is an important point which the reader should ponder on: All

1 It happened in the first (not the second) half of the fourth century. Constantine I (the Great) established Christianity as State religion in 324; Nicaean Council was held in 325; his new capital at Byzantium was inaugurated in 330 (hence Byzantine Empire) which was renamed Constantinople (City of Constantine); he died in 337. (Trans.)

their talks and discussions begin on some evangelical postulates, like the theme of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the scheme of crucifixion and atonement, and similar other principles. They base their talks on these ideas as though they were self-evident truths—and then go on building their edifice on them. They do not realize that it is their first and basic weakness. No matter how strong and lofty a structure may be, it cannot make up for the weakness of the foundation. And the foundation on which they have built their edifice—the three-in-one theology and the crucifixion and atonement—is simply incomprehensible.

Many Christian scholars agree that it is an idea that cannot be understood. Still they say that it is a religious tenet, therefore, it must be believed without asking for reason—after all, there are many things in religion which the reason says are impossible.

But it is one of the invalid ideas which spring from that invalid base. How can there be an impossible principle in the religion of truth? As far as we are concerned, it is through reason and understanding that we accept a religion and discern its truth and validity. How can a true belief contain something which reason invalidates? Is it not a contradiction in term?

Of course, religion accepts validity of miracles—the things which are possible in reason but impracticable; but an idea impossible in reason can never happen.

However, the above-mentioned way of "Argument" led their thinkers and scholars into conflicts, discords and disagreements in the very early days when the students gathered to learn Christianity at Alexanderia, Rome and other places.

The church increased its watchdog role to preserve the unity of creed. Whenever a differing view was expressed or new idea raised its head, the church called a council of the bishops and presbyters to convince the party concerned to leave their ideas and beliefs; and if they persisted they were anathematized, banished or even killed.

The first such council was held in Nicea, to counter the views of Arius[1],

1 Arius was Presbyter of Bancalis. A follower of Origen, he believed that Christ was a created being, not of the substance of God but created from "nothing"; he had a beginning and was thus not eternal. Although he was defeated at the Nicene Council (held in 325), subsequent Councils held at Arles, Milan and Sirmium (held in 353, 355 and 357, respectively) upheld his views. But it was again defeated in the Contantinople Council held in 381. Christian scholars say that Arians' 'temporary triumph' "had been made possible by

who said that the Son was not like the Father, that only God was eternal while Christ was a created being.

The bishops, and presbyters assembled at Constantinople, in presence of the Emperor Constantine; they were three hundred and thirteen in number. They adopted the following creed:

> We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnated from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose Kingdom there will be no end;
> And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets; in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead[1], and the life of the world to come[2]. Amen!

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imperial interference." But so was the case with the "original Nicene success" and its later victories. (See Williston Walker, A History of Christian Church, Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 107–117.) (Trans.)

1 People have commented on the last sentence that it affirms physical resurrection, while the Christians believe in spiritual resurrection only as the Gospel shows. But I think that the Gospel only indicates the absence of physical worldly enjoyments in the next world; it does not say that man will be resurrected in spirit only without his body. It rather says that man in the resurrection will become like angels, and there will be no sexual enjoyment among them. On the other hand, the Bible shows that even God and angels have bodies, let alone the man after resurrection. (Auth.)

2 The author has taken these details from al-Shahristānī's *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*. al-Shahristānī is confused when he says that the "first Council held at Nicea" assembled "At Constantinople". The Nicene Council had assembled in 325

That was the first Council; after that numerous Councils were held to anathematize newly appearing schisms, like the Nestorians, Jacobites, Ilyanites (?), Yalyarsites (?), Macedonians, Noetus, Sabellians, Paulianists, (or Paulicians) and many others.[1]

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at Nicea, and another Council was held at Constantinople in 381 C. E. The actual Nicene Creed is now only a matter of surmise. Probably it ended with the sentence, 'And in the Holy Spirit'. However, the Constantinople Council reconfirmed and enlarged it. That is why scholars refer to it as, "the so-called Nicene Creed," and sometimes with its technically correct name, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. But in spite of all that, its first appearance was at the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.); it was signed on 25/10/451, in presence of the Emperor Marcian. (See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, Longman, London, 3rd ed., 1972, pp. 296–297; and The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church, 2nd ed., O.U.P., 1977).
In al-Shahristānī's book, the number of participants of the first Council is given as 318 and not 313. (Trans.)

1 The author has taken these names from al-Shahristani. I could not find the names, and in the books I referred to al-Shahristānī, however, it gives the following details:
Ilyanites: A sub-sect of the Jacobites, found in Syria, Yemen, and Armenia. They believed that Jesus was not a body in reality; all the sufferings, killing and crucifixion happened only on an illusion (or illusory being).
Yalyarsites: They believed that people, on arriving at the heaven, would enjoy eating, drinking and sexual relations for a thousand years; thereafter, they would proceed to the bounties promised by Arius.
Macedonians: Named after Macedonius (died c. 362), Bishop of Constantinople. He strongly supported the semi-Arian cause in Council of Seleucia (359). From end of the fourth century, he is regarded as the founder of Pneumatomachi who are called Macedonians after him. They denied the full God-head of the Holy Ghost. See The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church; also W. Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p. 118.
Noetus: In Arabic text this name is mentioned in the last. I have put it before the Sabellians, etc., as it would facilitate understanding. Noetus, probably of Smyrna, taught in his native region in 180 to 200 "that Christ was the Father Himself, and the Father Himself was born and suffered and died". His views were called Modalistic Monarchianism. (W. Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p.69). Another name for that belief was Patripassion doctrine; Noetus also rejected Logo doctrine. (The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church).
Sabellians: Sabellianism is an alternative title for the Modalistic Monarchianism. Named after Sabbellus, who was teaching in Rome cir. 215. His theology was essentially that of Noetus, but much more carefully wrought out, especially in that it gave a definite place to the Holy Spirit, as well as to

The church was ever vigilant in guarding what in its eyes was the true faith. The missionary work continued in full force, until by the end of fifth century all European governments (except Russia) were parts of Christendom: France, England, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, etc., were all converted to Christianity by 496 C.E.

The Church continued to progress becoming stronger day by day. On the other hand, the Barbarians of the North were attacking the Roman Empire every now and then. The wars and internal strifes and unrest weakened the Empire—until a time came when the people of Rome together with the victorious tribes decided to hand over the affairs of the State to the Church. Now the Pope of the time, Gregory the Great[1], had in his hand the reins of the temporal as well as the spiritual powers. It was in 590 C.E.

Consequently, the Church of Rome acquired absolute power over the Christians world. But by that time the Roman Empire had divided in two parts: the Western Roman Empire with its capital at Rome and the Eastern Roman (that is, Byzantine) Empire with its capital at Constantinople. The Byzantine Emperors claimed for themselves the headship of Church within their domain, without accepting the authority of the Church of Rome. This led to the division of Christianity between the Catholics—the followers of the Church of Rome and the Orthodox, that is, others.

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the Son. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all one and the same. They are three names of one God, Who manifests Himself in different ways according to circumstances. (W. Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p. 69).

Paulianists: Followers of Paul of Samosata; he became Bishop of Antioch cir. 260. He taught a form of Dynamic Monarchianism in which God-head was a closely knit trinity of Father, Wisdom and Word, and until creation formed a single hypostasis. He was a precursor of Nestorius, holding that from Incarnation the Word rested upon the human Jesus as one person upon another, and that the Incarnated Christ differed only in degree from the prophets. (The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church).

Paulicians: A sect of the Byzantine Empire. Their name may have been derived from St. Paul, or more probably from Paul of Samosata. Endlessly persecuted, many of them assisted the Muslims in their wars against the empire and adopted Islam. Apparently they ceased to exist as an independent sect in the twelfth century. (*ibid.*) (Trans.)

1 Gregory I (590–604) established the temporal power of the Papacy in that period of unrest in Itlay. However, it was Pope Innocent III who during his Papacy (1198–1216) made several European Kings and Emperors to pay homage to him, accepting him as their overlord. (Trans.)

The things continued in this manner, until the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople, and Palaeologus, the last Byzantine Emperor and Head of the Eastern (that is, Orthoxod) Church, was killed in the Cathedral, Hagia Sophia[1].

The Tzars of Russia now claimed the headship of the Church—as a legacy of the Byzantine Emperors to whom they were related by marriage. (Russia had been Christian since the tenth century.) The Russian Emperors thus became he Heads of the (Orthodox) Church in their land, independent of the (Catholic) Church of Rome. It was in 1454 C. E.

The things continued in this way for about five centuries, until the last Tzar, Nicholas, was killed, with all his family, in 1918, by the Communists. Thus the Church of Rome almost returned to the condition that prevailed before the division.

Meanwhile, during the Middle Ages when the Vatican had reached the highest point of its glory and the Popes controlled every aspect of the people's lives, a lot of good Christians revolted against the Vatican in order to free themselves from the shackles which the Church had put on them.

One group refused to follow the Church of Rome or to obey the Popes, but they continued to accept the religion as interpreted by the Councils and agreed upon by their scholars. They are called the (Greek) Orthodox. Another group discarded the Roman Church altogether; they neither accept the said Church's interpretation of religion nor do they recognized the Pope's authority in any religious matter. They are the Protestants.

In this way, the Christians world is mainly divided into three sects: the Catholics who follow the Vatican and its teachings; the Orthodox, who accept the Catholic teachings but do not recognize the authority of the Vatican. As described above, this group resulted from the division of the Church (on the line of the Western and Eastern empires) and especially after the transfer of the Patriarchate from Constantinople to Moscow; and the Protestants, who recognize neither the authority of Vatican nor its teachings—they became independent in the fifteenth century of the Christian Era.

This is, in a nut-shell, the history of the Christian Church of the last two millenniums. Those who know the main theme of our book, will understand why we have written here this short account of their history.

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1 Constantine XIII palaeologus (1394–1453) was killed on 29th May, 1453. (Trans.)

Our aim was three-fold:

First: To provide to a research scholar an insight into various changes taking place in the religion of the Christians; and to make them aware as to how alien ideas have been implanted in their beliefs and rituals; how pagan superstitions and idolatrous thoughts have crept into Christianity—by hereditary influences, or social give and take, or wilful adoption, or just because old habits die-hard.

Second: The power of the Church—and especially the Church of Rome—gradually increased until it reached its zenith in the Middle Ages; the Popes had taken both temporal and spiritual powers in their hands, and the kings and emperors in Europe had to submit to the Papal decrees, and pay homage to the Popes. The Popes put on throne whomsoever they wished and removed whoever they wished[1].

It is narrated that the Pope once ordered the German emperor to stand barefoot on the door of the Papal Palace for three days (in the winter)—for expiation of some mistakes which he beseeched the Pope to forgive[2].

On another occasion, the Pope kicked with his foot the crown of a king who had approached him kneeling down to seek Papal pardon[3].

Those church leaders had described the Muslims to their followers in a way that the Christians were bound to regard Islam as a religion of idol-worshippers. You will see it in the slogans and poems which were written to incite and arouse the Christians against the Muslims during the Crusades which raged between the two powers for long years.

The Christians were led to believe[4] that the Muslims worshipped idols; that they believed in three gods: (1) Māhom (who is also called Afomed (?) and Mahounde), he is the first among gods and he is Muḥammad; (2) Apoline who is the second; and (3) Tervagān who is the third. Others added two more to this list: to Māratwān (?) and Jupiter; but their rank was below the first three. They said that Muḥammad's religion was based on his claim of divinity—that he claimed to be god. Sometimes the "information" was added that Muḥammad had taken for himself an idol made of gold.

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1 *al-Futūḥāt al-Islāmiyyah*. (Auth.)

2 *ibid.* (Auth.)

3 *ibid.* (Auth.)

4 This and the following descriptions have been taken from Cte Henry de Castries; *al-Diyānat al-Islāmiyyah*, ch. 1. (Auth.)

Richard composed poems to incite the Franks against the Muslims, in which he, inter alia, says: "Arise and dislodge Mahound and Tervagan and throw them into fire, so that you may get near your God."

Roland described Mahom, the "god of Muslims," in a poem, in which he says: "It is made of gold and silver; if you see it, you will know that no artisan can even imagine a more beautiful face, let alone make it; big in size, admirable in workmanship, majesty radiating from its features, Māhom is made of gold and silver, its brilliant splendor dazzles the eyes to blindness; it has been placed on an elephant which is the finest work of art; its stomach is hollow, and an onlooker may find lustrous light glowing from it (because) it is set with precious brilliant gems, (it is transparent, and) its inside may be seen from outside; its fine workmanship is matchless.

"The gods of Muslims used to inspire them at times of trouble and turmoil. The Muslims were once defeated in a battle; so their commander sent someone to call their god who was in Mecca (that is, Muḥammad). An 'eye-witness' says that the god (that is, Muḥammad,) came to them; a huge mob of his followers surrounded him; they were beating drums, playing lutes and blowing pipes and bagpipes made of silver; singing and dancing around him they brought him to the battleground, they were full of joy and happiness, making merry. His deputy was waiting for him; when he arrived (the deputy) stood up and began worshiping him with humbleness and humility."

Richard explains the revelation sent by the god, Māhom, in this manner: "The sorcerers captured a genie and put it in the stomach of that idol. That genie used to thunder and hammer inside and then speak to the Muslims, who listened to him with rapt attention."

Such droll flippancies are found in a lot of their books written during, or about, the Crusades. Our readers will, no doubt, be astounded and scandalized to read such accounts of their pure religion—may be some would even doubt the authenticity of these quotations. After all, they have ascribed such things to Islam that no one has ever seen in his life, nor has any Muslim imagined them or even dreamed of them[1].

Third: A deep thinker may easily recognize the changes that have

1 Many such astonishing "revelations" have been quoted by Norman Daniel in his, Islam and the West. *The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh University Press, 1960. (Trans.)

occurred in the Christianity during the past twenty centuries. The idolatrous beliefs crept imperceptibly into Christianity: first it was excessive reverence for Christ; then his message was cast into the mold of trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), which was further developed in the theory of crucifixion and atonement, which in its turn gave rise to the belief that law and its obedience was not needed at all, the faith was sufficient for salvation.

At first it appeared in religious garb; the Church insisted on some religious rites like prayer, fast and baptism. But opposite trends continued to grow and various ideas raised their heads, until the Protestantism appeared on the scene; the political turmoil and unrest gave way to formal secular laws based on the principle of freedom in the matters which were not covered by those laws. In this way, the teachings of religion became weaker and weaker, and continued to give ground to anti-religion forces, until moral values and virtuous conduct could not stand the onslaught of materialism which "the unrestricted freedom" had let loose on humanity.

Then appeared socialism and communism, based on Dialectic Materialism; belief in God and adherence to moral virtues and religious rites and deeds were discarded. Spiritual humanism was succeeded by materialistic animality composed of only two instincts: greed to gain for oneself whatever one desires and impulse to crush down whoever comes in one's way. Today the world is speeding to that animalistic goal, to its doom.

Various new religious revival movements that have lately appeared everywhere are but political games invented and played by political groups, who want to attain their goals through them. We know that politics, as a profession, now knocks at every door and uses every conceivable device to realize its aims.

According to Dr. Joseph Sittler, of Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, the underlying weakness of the current U. S. religious revival is that it seeks to give divine sanction to the cultural values modern man lives by. 'We make God say amen to what we believe, instead of saying amen to God.' The greatest danger, he feels, is that this pious self-flattery may immunize Americans against any desire to join in a genuine religious revival if one should arise[1].

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1 *The Life* (New York edition), John Knox Jessup, in the article, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, 26th December, 1955, p. 143. (Trans.)

According to Dr. Georges Florovsky, the 'foremost U. S. spokesman for Russian Orthodoxy', Christian teaching, which reaches most Americans through sentimental literature, consoles them instead of awakening them through deeply felt or 'witnessed' experience[1].

Whence the caravan of religion started from, and where has it arrived? The message began in the name of revival of religion (that is, belief), morality (that is, virtuous character) and the shariah (good deeds); and ended up by repudiating and abolishing all of it, replacing it with animalistic enjoyment.

This has happened because of the first deviation affected by the Apostle St. Paul and his disciples. We are living in a civilization that admittedly threatens mankind with extinction. Some people say that Christ is the leader and standard-bearer of the modern civilization. But it would be nearer to truth to call it the Paulian civilization.

Examining Narrations

(1) al-Qummī narrates about the verse: *It is not meet for a man that Allah should give him the Book and the Wisdom and Prophethood, then he should say to men, Be my servants rather than Allah's*: "Surely Jesus did not say to men: 'I have created you, therefore you should be my servants rather than God's', rather he said to them: 'Be worshippers of the Lord', that is, having true knowledge." (*al-Tafsīr*)

Author's comment: The context and associations given in the Commentary support this explanation. "Surely Jesus did not say to men: 'I have created you.' " It is a sort of a proof to show that he had not said it. Had he told them to worship him, it would have been necessary to tell them that he was their creator; but he had not said it, nor had he created them.

(2) The same exegete narrates about the verse: *Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords.* "There were people who worshipped the angels; the Christians thought Jesus was the Lord; and the Jews said that 'Uzayr was the Son of God. God therefore said that no prophet would enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for Lords." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: It has been explained in the Commentary.

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1 *ibid*. (Trans.)

(3) It is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Bayhaqī (in his *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah*) from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said: "When the Jewish scholars and Christians of Najrān gathered near the Messenger of God and he invited them to Islam, Abū Rāfiʿ al-Quraẓī said: 'Do you wish, O Muḥammad, that we should worship you as the Christians worship Jesus son of Mary?' Thereupon a Christian of Najrān said: 'Well, do you want this from us, O Muḥammad?' The Messenger of God said: 'I seek refuge in God that we should worship other than God, or that we should enjoin worship of someone else; He has neither sent me with it nor has He enjoined me this.'
Therefore, God, revealed the verses (because of their question): *It is not meet for a man … after you are Muslims (submitting ones)?*" (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(4) It is reported in the same book: "ʿAbd b. Hamid has narrated from al-Ḥasan that he said: 'I have been told that a man said: "O Messenger of God! We greet you (exactly) as we greet each other. Should not we prostrate before you?" He said: "No. But you should honor your Prophet, and recognize the right of the ones having that right; because prostration should not be done for anyone other than God." Then God revealed the verses: *It is not meet for a man … after you are Muslims (submitting ones)?*' " (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: Also other events have been narrated concerning revelation of these verses. Obviously, all of them are based on academic inferences: and we have discussed in detail about them. Also, it is possible for various reasons to combine in relation to one verse. And God knows better.

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Verses 81–85

The verses are not disjointed from the preceding ones; they have been revealed in the same context. Earlier, God had described that the People of the Book transgressed the limits by indulging in alteration of the Books they were given, creating doubts and confusion among the people, making differences between the prophets, and rejecting the signs of the truth of the Messenger of God; then He showed how impossible it was for a prophet like Moses or Jesus (peace be on them both) to tell the people to take him or some other prophets or the angels as their lords—as the Christians openly claimed and the Jews implied.

Now He puts more emphasis on the impossibility of such an idea. How can any prophet give such an order to his people, when God has made covenant with the prophets that they must believe in and help every prophet no matter whether he preceded them or came after them? They were to fulfill that promise by confirming the truth of the preceding prophets and giving good news of those who were to come after them—as Jesus verified the prophethood of Moses and his laws, and foretold the advent of Muḥammad. Likewise, God made acovenant with them that they should make a similar covenant with their people, and made them witnesses over them; and then declared that it was the Islam—submission—which dominates all those who are in the heavens and in the earth.

Then God enjoins His Prophet to adhere to that covenant: he is to believe in God and all that was sent to His prophets—without making any distinction between them, and to surrender to God. He was to enter into the covenant on his own behalf, and also on behalf of his *ummah.* That is why it is said that the covenant was made with him directly, and with his *ummah* through him, as we shall explain later.

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ
جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ ۚ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ
وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِي ۖ قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا ۚ قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ
مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

(3:81) ***And when Allah made a covenant with the prophets: Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom—then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him. He said: Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)? They said: We do affirm. He said: Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you.***

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The verse speaks of a covenant that was made. *Mīthāq al-nabīyyīn* (translated here as "covenant with the prophets"), literally means 'covenant of the prophets'. This covenant was taken for the prophets (as the clause, *then a Messenger comes to you … you must aid him* , points to), as well as "with the prophets" (as the clauses, *He said: Do you affirm …* , and, *Say: We believe in Allah …* , show). The covenant was therefore made for the prophets and with the prophets—although it was made with the prophets' people too, through the prophets.

The phrase, "covenant of the prophets," may therefore refer to the covenant made "with" them and to that "for" them, while in fact it is the same covenant looked at from different angles. In other words, "the prophets," may refer to those prophets "for" whom the covenant was made, and` also to those "with" whom it was made. However, the import of the preceding two verses (*It is not meet for a man … after you are Muslims*) which were revealed in the same context, gives rather more weight to the idea that, "the prophets," refers to those "with" whom the covenant was made. Looking in this context the verses have the following connotation: 'It was not possible for the prophets, after God gives them the Book, the Wisdom and Prophethood, to call the people to take someone other than God as their lord or to worship him. How can it be possible while God has made covenant with them to believe in, and help, other prophets of God—who enjoin their peoples to believe in one God.' It is for this reason that this verse begins with mention of the covenant—focusing our attention to it.

Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom **(lamā**[1]

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1 *Lamā* (with the vowel *'A'* after *'l'*, and without putting emphasis on *'m'*) is in accordance with the well-known recital (of all the reciters except Ḥamzah). Accordingly *mā* (is a relative pronoun meaning, "what" or "whatsoever"; *Ataytukum* (I have given you) is its *al-Ṣilah* (= antecedent). Its another recital is *ātaynākum* (= We have given you). The objective pronoun that should come here is omitted because the phrase "of Book and Wisdom," points to it. The

ātaytukum min kitābin wa ḥikmah): The whole sentence describes the covenant that was made, which would be as follows: 'That which I have given you of Book and Wisdom, then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you should believe in that Messenger and aid him without fail.'[1]

The second person plural pronoun "you" in "have given you" and "comes to you," apparently refers to "the prophets". But the speech, *Do you affirm and accept my compact in this,* indicates that it includes the people of the prophets too; that is, the talk is directed to the prophets only but the order (that is, covenant) covers their people too. The people are as much obliged to believe in and help the coming Messenger as are the prophets themselves.

The conjunctive "then" in the clause "then a Messenger comes to you," obviously shows a delay in time; in other words, it was incumbent on a preceding prophet to believe in and help a prophet who would come after him. On the other hand, the verse 3:84 (*Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham …)*, implies that the covenant was made with each of the preceding and the following prophets for the other—the following prophets too were required to believe in and help the preceding ones. But it is only an inference; the words are silent about this matter—as we shall explain later, God willing.

There are two third person singular pronouns in the clauses, "you must believe in him, and you must aid him". Both may refer to the "Messenger"

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whole phrase is the subject, and, "you must believe in him, and you must aid him," the predicate *la,* in *lamā,* denotes beginning of the sentence, while in *latuʾminunna bihi* (you must believe in him) it is for emphasis and oath. (Auth.)

1 There is another syntactical possibility: *ma* in *lamā* may be a conditional pronoun, meaning "when"; and "you must believe in him," its answer. The meaning, in this case, would be like this: *'When I have given you of Book and Wisdom and then a Messenger comes to you … you must believe in him, and you must aid him.'* This explanation is rather more appropriate (because it is more common to add *la* of oath on the "Answer" of a conditional sentence), and the meaning in this case is clearer; also it is more usual to put conditional clauses in covenants.
A reciter has recited *limā* using the vowel *'i'* (instead of *'A'*) for *'l'*. In that case *'li'* would denote reason, and *limā ātaytukum* would mean 'because of that which I have given you'. But the first recital carries more weight. (Auth.)

who was to come later; there is no difficulty in the idea of one prophet believing in another; as God says: *The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and* (so do) *the believers; everyone of them believes in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers* (2:285). Nevertheless, it appears from the verse: *Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham … ,* that the first pronoun refers to the Book and the Wisdom that was revealed, and the second one to the Messenger.

The meaning therefore would be as follows: 'You must believe in what I have given you of the Book and the Wisdom, and you must aid the Messenger who comes to you verifying that which is with you.'

He said: Do you affirm and accept my compact in this (matter)?" They said: We do affirm: The question was put for confirmation. *al-Iqrār* (= affirmation; acknowledgment); *al-iṣr* (compact, covenant), it is the object of the verb, "accept". Literally, the clause means, 'And take my compact in this'. The prophets were to take or make God's covenant; obviously there should be a second party there to enter into covenant with them, and it could be none except their own *ummah.* The verse therefore means: 'Do you affirm this covenant and have you made this compact of mine with your people? They said: "We do affirm."

An exegete has said: Taking God's compact means that the prophets accepted that covenant for themselves. If so, then, "(Do you) take my compact in this (matter)," would be an explicative apposition of the preceding clause, "Do you affirm?" This explanation is strengthened by their response, as they only said, "We do affirm," without saying anything about taking the compact. Accordingly, the covenant would be restricted to the prophets; their *ummah* would not be included in it. On the other hand, the next directive, *Then bear witness,* goes against this explanation; obviously one bears witness for or against other than oneself. Also, the next directive (*Say: We believe in Allah …)* uses plural pronoun, *We*, and not, *I*, apparently, it is a declaration of faith by the Messenger of God for himself and on behalf of his *ummah.* Therefore, "taking of compact" would mean making the compact with the *ummah.* Although, it may be said that it is these two sentences, *Then bear witness,* and, *We believe in Allah,* which prove the participation of the *ummah* with the prophets in this compact, while, "take my compact in this," is not related to this matter.

He said: Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you: Obviously, the witness, as explained above, is borne for or against

someone else; therefore, it is concerned both with the prophets and their people. As mentioned above, also the next directive, (*Say: We believe in Allah*), proves it. And the context too supports this meaning: The verses were revealed to reprove the People of the Book for their rejecting the message of the Messenger of God and for ascribing falsehoods to Jesus, Moses and some other prophets (peace be on them all); and it is in this background that they have been rebuked: *Is it then other than Allah's religion that they seek (to follow)?*

Some exegetes have said that the order, "Then bear witness," refers to the prophets bearing witness for one another; others have written that this order was given to the angels who were to bear witness, and that it is not concerned with the prophets.

Comment: These two meanings, although possibly correct in themselves, cannot be inferred from the verse without an association; and you have seen that the association goes against it.

One of the fine points in this verse deserves special attention. Read the words, *Allah made a covenant with the prophets,* in conjunction with the clause, *then a Messenger comes to you.* You will see that the covenant was made with the prophets for the Messenger. And we have described in the commentary of the verse 2:213 (*Mankind was but one people…*) that messengership is more particular than prophethood, that every messenger is a prophet but not every prophet is a messenger. The verse therefore obviously means that the covenant was made with the rank of prophethood for the rank of messengership—but not vice versa.

Keeping this connotation in view, we may question the comprehensiveness of the explanation given by an exegete that the covenant was made with the prophets that they would believe in each other and would tell one another to believe in each other—the religion is one which all the prophets invite to.

The meaning in fact should be as follows: God made a covenant with the prophets and their people that if God gave them Book and Wisdom and then a messenger came to them, verifying that which was with them, they would surely believe in what he would bring to them and help him; a later coming prophet would help a preceding (or contemporary) messenger by affirming his truth, and a preceding prophet would foretell the coming of a later messenger and enjoin his *ummah* to believe in him (the coming messenger), affirm his truth and help him in his cause. This covenant thus implies and affirms the Oneness of Divine Religion.

Another exegete has explained the verse as follows: "God made a covenant with the prophets that they would affirm the truth of Muḥammad and give their people the good tidings of his advent." This meaning is correct in itself; but it cannot be discerned from the wording of the verse. Of course, we may infer it from the context, as we have explained earlier: The verse is among the ones that argue against the People of the Book, admonishing and rebuking them for their tendency of altering the Books, hiding the signs foretold of the Holy Prophet of Islam, transgressing the limit and turning away from the clear truth.

فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(3:82) ***Whoever therefore turns back after this, these it is that are the transgressors:***

It puts emphasis on the above-mentioned covenant. The meaning is clear.

أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(3:83) ***Is it then other than Allah's religion that they seek (to follow), and to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him shall they be returned?***

The question arises from the preceding verses. Well, God's religion is one; it was about that religion that the covenant was made with the prophets and their people; it was incumbent upon the preceding prophets and their people to foretell the advent of the Messenger who was to follow and they had to believe in his message and help him. Well, is it not strange—in this background—the way the People of the Book are behaving? What do they want when they deny your truth? They show the desire to follow the religion. If so, then do they seek a religion other than Islam which is the only Divine Religion? There can be no other explanation why they do not accept your truth, why they do not hold fast to the religion of Islam. Undoubtedly, it was incumbent upon them to accept and follow Islam, because it is the religion which is based on nature—a religion should not go against nature. Do they need a proof? Then see how all those inhabitants of the heavens and the earth (who have been endowed with sense

and intelligence) submit to God—on the level of creation—then let them also submit to him on the level of legislation.

...and to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly: This is the Islam—submission—that encompasses all who are in the heavens and the earth, including the People of the Book, who it says, are not Muslims. The word used here is *aslama* (he submitted), in past tense, which shows that the action has already taken place; in other words, they have already submitted to God.

Obviously, it can only refer to their submission in creative affairs—they cannot go against His decree in matters of creation. It does not refer to Islam in the sense of religion, or in the meaning of belief and worship. The words, "willingly or unwillingly," support, nay, prove this explanation.

Keeping the above explanation in view, it appears that the words, "to Him submits," gives a proof, a reason, without mentioning, for the sake of brevity, its result and conclusion. The complete talk would be as follows: 'Do they seek to follow a religion other than Islam? But it is the religion of God; whoever is in the heavens and the earth submits to Him and obeys His order. If these People of the Book would accept it, their submission would be done willingly; if they disliked what God has decreed for them and tried to seek something else, the Divine Decree would nevertheless be enforced, however they might dislike it.'

It appears from it that the conjunctive *wa* (or) in, "willingly or unwillingly," denotes division. The alternatives point to their willing acceptance of what God has decreed for them of the things they like; and their resentment of Divine Decrees in matters they dislike, for example, death, poverty and sickness, etc.

…and to Him shall they be returned: It is another reason why they must seek Islam as religion. They are bound to return to God, their true Lord; they would not be able to hide from God or to go to what their disbelief and polytheism leads them to rely on.

قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴿٨٤﴾

(3:84) ***Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and***

Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.

God enjoins the Prophet to adhere to the covenant which was made with him and the others. He should declare as follows, for himself and on behalf of the believers from his *ummah:* "We believe in God and what has been revealed …"

It is a proof, as we have said above, that the covenant was made with the prophets and their people together.

…and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael … and to Him do we submit: All those mentioned here were prophets from the progeny of Abraham. The verse implies that the word, "the tribes," refers to the prophets from the progeny of Jacob—from the Children of Israel—like David, Solomon, Jonah, Job and others. Then comes the phrase, "the prophets from their Lord"; it makes the declaration comprehensive, as it covers Adam, Noah and all the others. Then a reference is made to the whole group, saying, "we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit."

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(3:85) ***And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.***

It negates and nullifies all that is outside the purview of the said covenant. It further emphasizes the obligation of following the terms of the covenant.

Examining Narrations

(1) The Leader of the faithful (ʿAlī) said: "Verily, God made covenant with the prophets (who came) before our Prophet that they should inform their people of his advent and his characteristics, give them his good news and enjoin them to affirm his truth." (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*)

(2) Ibn Jarīr has narrated from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (may God be pleased with him) that he said: "God did not send any prophet—Adam

and those who came after him—without making a covenant with him about Muḥammad: If he (Muḥammad,) was sent when that prophet was alive, he must believe in him and help him; and He enjoined him to make a (similar) covenant with his people." Then the Imam recited the verse, And when Allah made a covenant with the prophets: Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: These two traditions explain the verse keeping both the words and the context in view, as we have written above.

(3) al-Ṣādiq explained this verse as follows: "When God made a covenant with the people of the prophets—(with) every *ummah*—for affirming the truth of its prophet and following what they (the prophets) would bring to them; but (the people) did not fulfill it (that is, the covenant) and neglected much of their laws and altered (it) to a great extent." (*Majmaᶜ al-bayān; al-Jawāmiᶜ*)

Author's comment: The above tradition applies the verse to a particular situation; it therefore does not conflict with the explanation given in the Commentary that the verse refers to a covenant made with the prophets together with their people.

(4) The Leader of the faithful said explaining the words: *He said: Do you affirm …:* "He (God) said: 'Do you affirm? And have you made this compact with your people?' They (that is, the prophets and their people) said: 'We do affirm what Thou hast enjoined us to affirm.' God said: 'Then bear witness over your people in this respect, and I too am one of the bearers of witness with you, over you and your people.' " (*Majmaᶜ al-bayān*)

(5) Ibn Jarīr narrates from ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib that he said about the words, Then bear witness: "God said: 'Then bear witness over your people in this respect; and I too am one of the bearers of witness with you, over you and them. Then whoever turns away from you, O Muḥammad, after this covenant taken from all the people, these it is that are the transgressors, they are the disobedient ones, (steeped) in disbelief.' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: Its explanation has been given earlier.

(6) al-Ṣādiq said: "(God) said to them (when they were) in (the state of) particle: 'Do you affirm and accept my compact in this matter?' They said: 'We do affirm.' Then God said to the angels: 'Then bear witness.' " (*al-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

Author's comment: The wording of the verse is not in conflict with this explanation, although, as we have said earlier, it is not inferred from its apparent meanings.

(7) It is written in *al-Durr al-manthūr* concerning the verse, *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam …*: "Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī (in his *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*) have narrated from Abū Hurayrah that he said: 'The Messenger of God said: "The deeds shall come on the Day of Resurrection. So the prayer will come and say, 'O Lord, I am prayer,' and He will say, 'Surely you are on good.' And the alms will come and say, 'O Lord I am alms,' and He will say, 'Surely you are on good.' Then the fast will come and say, 'I am fast,' and He will say, 'Surely you are on good.' Then the deeds will come (one after another) and God will go on saying, 'Surely you are on good; (until Islam will come and God will say:) 'With thee shall I take today and with thee shall I give.' God says in His Book: *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers*'.

(8) al-Ṣādiq said about this verse: "It (that is, Islam) means their believing in the Oneness of God, the Mighty, the Great." (*al-Tawḥīd*; *al-Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: The belief in monotheism requires that the servant should accept, and submit to, whatever God wants him to do. It therefore implies the same thing which has been written in the commentary. If on the other hand it is explained just as "not ascribing anyone or anything to God," then the willingness and unwillingness (mentioned in a preceding verse) would imply voluntary and compulsory guidances.

There are several other traditions narrated by al-ʿAyyāshī and al-Qummī (in their books) and others, in explanation of the verse, *And when Allah made a covenant with the prophets* In those traditions the words, *you must believe in him, and you must aid him,* have been explained as follows:

> You must believe in the Messenger of God and you must aid the Leader of the faithful—blessings and peace be on them.

Obviously, these traditions refer the former pronoun, *him,* to the Messenger of God and the later, *him,* to the Leader of the faithful (ʿAlī), without there being any proof or association for it in the wording of the verse.

Nevertheless, a tradition given by al-ʿAyyāshī may solve this problem.

He narrates from Salām b. al-Mustanīr, from Abū ʿAbdillāh that he said:

> "They have taken for themselves a name, that God named no one with it except ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib—and there has not come its interpretation yet." I said: "May I be your ransom! When will its interpretation come?" He said: "When it comes, God shall gather before Him the prophets and the believers, so that they should help him. And it is the words of God, *And when Allah made a covenant with the prophets and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you.*

This tradition solves the problem. The problem arises if we take those traditions as an exegesis or explanation of the verse (but this tradition shows that they do not purport to give the exegesis; they aim at pointing at its interpretation). And we have described earlier that interpretation is not meaning of the word, nor a thing related to word.[1]

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1 Vide the discourse under the following verse: *He it is Who sent down to thee the Book* (3:7). See *al-Mīzān* (Eng.), vol. 5, (Trans.)

Verses 86–91

These verses may possibly be connected to the preceding ones dealing with the People of the Book; but apparently they are separate and revealed in another context.

كَيْفَ يَهْدِى اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(3:86) ***How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their believing* (īmānihim)*, and they have borne witness that the Messenger was true and clear arguments had come to them? And Allah does not guide the unjust people***

The question shows improbability of the situation; that it is impossible for them to get guidance. The verse ends with the sentence, "And God does not guide the unjust people". We have explained somewhere earlier that in such sentences the adjective explains the reason, that is, God does not guide them because they are unjust, and as long as they persist in injustice they will not get Divine Guidance. Of course, they could not be debarred from that guidance if they repented and returned to God.

And they have borne witness that the Messenger was true: If the verse refers to the People of the Book, then the bearing of witness would refer to their realization that the signs foretold of the awaited prophet perfectly fitted on the Messenger of God; and the next clause, "And clear argument had come to them," would refer to that reality. If, on the other hand, it refers to those who apostatized after professing Islam, then the "witness" refers to their affirmation of the truth of the Prophet—not only a ritual affirmation resulting from ignorance or tribal influence, but the one based on clear understanding, as the clause, "And clear arguments had come to them," indicates.

In any case, as the verse contains the clause, "And they have borne witness that the Messenger was true," it shows that the disbelief refers to their rejection of faith after the truth was made clear to them, after the proof was completed against them. They had disbelieved only because

they hated the truth, because they haughtily wrangled with the believer and transgressed the limit unjustly. It is this injustice which does not let its people find their way to safety and deliverance.

There is another syntactic explanation given for the clause, "And they have borne witness". It has been said that it is in conjunction with the word *īmānihim* (their belief) and it means, 'who disbelieved after they had believed and after they had borne witness.' Yet another explanation: The conjunctive, "And," in the clause, "And they have borne witness," has a circumstantial connotation, and the sentence means, 'while they have borne witness'. In this case it would be a circumstantial clause.

أُولَٰئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(3:87–88) ***(As for) these, their reward is that upon them is the curse of Allah and the angels and of men, all together. Abiding in it; their chastisement shall not be lightened nor shall they be respited.***

We have earlier explained how all the curse returns to such people. For detail see the Commentary of the following verse: … *these it is whom Allah does curse, and those who curse do curse them* (too) (2:159)[1]

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾

(3:89) ***Except those who repent after that and amend* (aṣlaḥū)*, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful:***

Aṣlaḥū (amended, changed to better) points to sincerity of repentance; that they repent with true heart, by which the impurity of disbelief is removed and their soul is purified by true belief. This word does not refer to doing good deeds; of course, good deeds follow the sincere repentance and are inseparable from it, yet they are not a part of repentance. The clause, "then surely God is Forgiving, Merciful," puts the reason to point to its unspoken result. Its connotation is as follows: then God forgives them and has mercy on them, because God is Forgiving, Merciful.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ ازْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَنْ تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ

1 See *al-Mīzān* (Eng.), vol. 2 (Trans.)

وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الضَّالُّونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ مِلْءُ الْأَرْضِ ذَهَبًا وَلَوِ افْتَدَىٰ بِهِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(3:90–91) ***Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief, their repentance shall never be accepted, and these are they that have gone astray. Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers, the earth full of gold* (mil al-arḍi dhahaban)[1] *shall not be accepted from one of them, though he should offer to ransom himself with it; these it is who shall have a painful chastisement, and they shall have no helpers.***

The two verses together explain the reason of the verse in the beginning, "How shall God guide a people who disbelieved after their believing." It applies a general rule to a particular case. A man, who disbelieves after truth has been made manifest to him and proof completed against him, and who then does not sincerely return to God, can belong to one of the two categories: Either he is an apostate who disbelieves after believing, then increases in unbelief and goes on transgressing without ever thinking of amending his ways; God shall not guide such a person nor will He accept his insincere repentance, because he does not turn to God with sincerity; he is totally lost, and there is no hope at all of his returning to the right path. Or, he is an unbeliever who dies in his disbelief, in his aversion to truth, without ever repenting; God shall not guide him in the hereafter to the Garden, because he himself never tried to return to his Lord; and there is no substitute for this returning to Lord, for repentance. He therefore will have nothing to offer as ransom, nor will any intercessor or helper intercede on his behalf or help him.

In this context, look at the sentence, "And these are they that have gone astray". In Arabic it is a "nominal sentence," because its predicate is a *nomen agentis, al-ḍāllūn* (lit: strayers); such a sentence indicates permanence. Then there is the demonstrative pronoun *ulāʾika* (those) which is used for distant objects; and it shows that they are removed far from

1 *al-Mil* is a quantity that fills a pot; in the phrase, a quantity of gold that would fill the earth (*mil al-arḍi dhahaban*), the earth is taken for a pot that is filled by gold. It is an imaginative metaphor (*al-istiʿārah bi al-kināyah*). (Auth.)

mercy of God. Thus there are three modes of emphasis which have been combined here: addition of a separate personal pronoun, "they," use of a noun (*nomen agentis*) for predicate; and the definite article *Al* (the) before the said predicate. All these together prove that they are hardened wrong-doers and transgressors for whom there is no hope of guidance.

Likewise, the last sentence, "And they shall have no helpers," proves that they will not get benefit of intercession—it is the intercessors who shall be the helpers on the Day of Resurrection. We have earlier explained that the use of plural, example, *intercessors,* in the verse 26:101 (*So we have no intercessors*) proves that there shall be intercessors on the Day of Judgment but the unbelievers shall not be able to avail themselves of their intercession.[1] The same is the import of the plural, "helpers," in this place.

The second verse says that no ransom shall be accepted from them, nor will they get any helper. It is because these things are substitutes, which are used when the original thing is not available. They lost their chance of repentance in this life and there is nothing that can be a substitute of repentance in the hereafter.

It also shows that the clause, "And die while they are unbelievers," implies that they died without repentance. As such, there is no conflict between this apparently exclusive statement and the following verse which says: *And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says. Surely now I repent ; nor* (for) *those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom We have prepared a painful chastisement* (4:18). In this verse, *when death comes,* means, when the death approaches and man sees the signs of the next world and his ties with this world are cut off. Obviously at this point of time the door of repentance is closed on him.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is reported in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* about the verses, *How shall Allah guide a people …*: "It is said that the verses were revealed about a man from the Anṣār, al-Ḥārith b. Suwayd b. al-Ṣāmit by name; he had treacherously killed al-Mujadhdhar b. Dhiyād al-Balawī, fled (from Medina), renounced Islam and reached Mecca. Thereafter he felt remorse and sent a message to his people

1 See the details in the discourse of "Intercession" under the verse 2:48 in Eng. vol. 1 (Trans.)

to ask the Messenger of God whether he would be allowed to repent. They asked (the Messenger of God); so the verses were revealed: *How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their believing … Except those who repent after that and amend …* A man from his clan took these verses to him. (Hearing them) he said: 'I surely know that you are truthful, and the Messenger of God is truer than you, and God is the most truthful of the three.' So he returned to Medina, repented and his Islam was good. It is reported from Mujāhid and al-Suddī; and the same is narrated from Abū ʿAbdillāh."

(2) Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn al-Mundhir have narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said: "Verily al-Ḥārith b. Suwayd killed al-Mujadhdhar b. Dhiyād and Qays b. Zayd (from Banū Ḍubayʿah) during the Battle of Uḥud, and then went over to Quraysh, and remained at Mecca. Thereafter he sent message to his brother, al-Julās, expressing his desire of repentance, so that he could return to his people. Thereupon, God sent these verses about him: *How shall Allah guide a people …*" (Then the story continues as above.) (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: This story has been narrated through other chains, and there are many differences among them: For example, ʿIkrimah says that it was revealed about Abū ʿĀmir al-Rāhib, al-Ḥārith b. Suwayd b. al-Ṣāmit and Waḥwaḥ b. al-Aslat (among twelve persons) who had renounced Islam and went over to Quraysh. Later they wrote to their families whether their repentance would be accepted. Then these verses were revealed.

Another example is found in *Majmaʿ al-bayān,* that the verse, *Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief …*, was revealed about the eleven companions of al-Ḥārith b. Suwayd. When al-Ḥārith returned (to Medina), they said: 'We shall remain in Mecca in our disbelief as long as we wished; later on if and when we wanted to return (to Medina) we would return, and there would come for us too what had been revealed about al-Ḥārith.' When the Messenger of God conquered Mecca, some of them re-entered into Islam and their repentance was accepted. And it was revealed about those of them who had died in disbelief, *Surely those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers …* (This report has been attributed to some exegetes.)

There is a third view that it was revealed about the People of the Book.

Others say that the verse, *Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief …*, was revealed particularly for the Jews, because at first they believed (in Moses), then disbelieved in Jesus, then increased in unbelief by rejecting Muḥammad (blessings of God be on him and his progeny and the two prophets).

There are other explanations given by other people.

If you ponder on these views, explanations and traditions, you will realize that all are based on personal opinions of the ancient exegetes —as some later ones have remarked. As for the tradition attributed to al-Ṣādiq, it is *al-mursalah* and weak. Moreover, it is possible for a verse to have more than one cause for its revelation; and God knows better.

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Verses 92–95

The connection of the first verse with the preceding ones is not clear; possibly it was not revealed with the remaining verses (which are clearly connected to each other). We had encountered a similar difficulty in deciding the revelation date of the verse: *Say: O People of the Book! come to a word common between us and you* (3:64).

Someone has tried to show its relation with the other verses. He says:

> The verse like the rest of the talk is addressed to the Children of Israel. Previously they were admonished and rebuked because they loved this world, and preferred wealth and riches to the Divine Religion. Now it says to them: You tell a lie when you claim a special relationship with God and His prophets, and when you say that you are pious and righteous ones. See what the truth is; you love your good property and sit on it refusing to spend from it in God's way. You only spend from undesirable things which you do not care about. But man can never attain to righteousness unless he spends out of what he loves, that is, from good properties; and if you spend out of it God shall preserve it for you and give you its reward in the hereafter.

That is the gist of what he has written; but, as you see, it is stretching the point too far.

As for the rest of the verses, their connection with the preceding one is quite clear.

لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّىٰ تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ ۚ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

(3:92) ***Never shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love; and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it.***

al-Birr means comprehensive good-doing. al-Rāghib says:

> "*al-Barr* (land) is opposite of *al-baḥr* (sea); it led to the idea of spaciousness, and from that is derived *al-barr* which means

spaciousness or comprehensiveness in good-doing."

"Good-doing" is used in an unrestricted sense. It covers the action of heart (like true belief and pure intention) as well as the action of body (like worship of God and spending in His way).[1] And it is this very sense in which this word has been used in the following verse: *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is the one who believes in Allah and the Last Day, the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keeps up prayer and pays the zakāt; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts* (2:177).

Reading this verse in conjunction with the one under discussion, one may clearly understand that spending wealth out of love for God is an essential part of righteousness; and making righteousness dependent on this spending shows the utmost importance attached to it particularly. It is because man by nature has too much attachment with the wealth he has gathered; he thinks that it is a part of his being, if it goes then a portion of his life is gone. There is no such difficulty in other acts of worship and good deeds where nothing seems to be lost.

It is not difficult, in view of the above discourse, to see the weakness of an exegete's explanation that 'righteousness is spending from what you love.' Perhaps he thought that the verse is framed in the style of the sentence, 'You cannot get rid of hunger until you eat!' The verse 2:177 is enough to show inaptness of this explanation.

The same verse (2:177) also makes it clear that *al-birr* has been used in its literal sense, that is, comprehensiveness in good-doing, because it explains it by enumerating all-encompassing good of faith and deed. And it shows the inappropriateness of an explanation that *al-birr* means bounty and favor of God; or of someone else's interpretation that it means the Garden.

...and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it: It strengthens and gladdens the spenders' hearts. They should know that what they have spent from their cherished wealth and property is not wasted, has not gone unnoticed, because God Who has enjoined them to do so, knows their

1 We have used the word "righteousness" in translation to convey this comprehensive goodness. (Trans.)

spending and what they spend.

كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حِلًّا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَائِيلُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تُنَزَّلَ التَّوْرَاةُ ۗ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِالتَّوْرَاةِ فَاتْلُوهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(3:93) *All food[1] was lawful to the Children of Israel—except that which Israel had forbidden to himself—before the Torah was revealed. Say: Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful.*

Israel was (the acquired name of) the Prophet Jacob; he got this name because he endeavoured hard in the way of God; the People of the Book say that it means 'one who vanquished God and prevailed against Him'. The Torah says that he wrestled with God in a place called Peniel and vanquished Him[2]. But the Qur'an rejects it and the reason says that such thing is impossible.

The clause, "except that which Israel had forbidden to himself," is exception from the above–mentioned "food". The next clause, "before the Torah was revealed," is related to the verb "was lawful"; it means: God had not forbidden any food to the Children of Israel before the Torah was revealed, except that which Israel had forbidden for himself.

The following sentence, *Say: Bring them the Torah and read it, if you are truthful*, indicates that the Jews were not admitting that every food was lawful to them before the Torah was revealed. They had to say so because they did not accept that Divine Laws could be abrogated. (We have described it under the verse 2:106, *Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it*.[3] No wonder, they disputed the words of God where He says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful to them* (4:160).

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1 *al-Ṭaʿām* (whatever is eaten); the people of Ḥijāz (in whose language the Qur'an was revealed) use this word particularly for wheat, and it is this meaning they understand when the word is used without any association. *al-ḥill* (lawfulness) is opposite of *al-ḥurmah* (unlawfulness, prohibition); probably it is derived from *al-ḥall* (to open) which is opposite of *al-ʿAqd* or *al-ʿAql* (to tie, to bind)—thus lawfulness has a connotation of openness, unrestrictedness. (Auth.)

2 See Genesis 32:24–30. (Trans.)

3 See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 2. (Pub.)

Likewise, the last verse, *Say: Allah has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Abraham … ,* indicates that they were trying to create doubts in the minds of the Muslims through these denials. They did not admit that every food was lawful to them before the revelation of the Torah; nor that many lawful things were forbidden to them because of their iniquity; and through these denials they disputed the claim of the Messenger of God (which was based on Divine Revelation) that his religion was that of Abraham, and that it was the natural religion free from excess and shortcoming. The Jews said: "How can it be true, when Abraham was a Jew in religion, on the shariah of Torah? How could religion of Abraham allow what was forbidden in the Torah, when abrogation is not allowed?"

It is clear now that the verse intends to answer the questions which the Jews had put about, and by which they had tried to confuse the Muslims. Obviously, they had not put these questions directly to the Messenger of God, but to the believers during their social contacts. This inference is supported by the fact that the Qur'an has not mentioned here their objection or question at all, unlike many occasions where it has quoted their sayings before replying. For example, *And the Jews say: The hand of Allah is tied up* (5:64); *And they say: Fire shall not touch us but for a few days* (2:80); *And they say: Our hearts are covered* (2:88); there are several such verses.

Moreover, the verses 3:99–100, coming soon after this talk clearly show that the Jews were trying to mislead the believers through such insidious propaganda: *Say: O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allah? … O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who have been given the Book, they will turn you back as unbelievers after you have believed.*

In short, the Jews objected as follows: How can your Prophet be true as he accepts validity of abrogation? He says that God had disallowed many lawful things to the Jews because of their iniquity. But it entails abrogation of a previously ordained law, which is not acceptable in case of God. What is unlawful will remain unlawful forever; it is not possible for a Divine Law to change.

God directed His Prophet to answer them as follows: The Torah says that every food was lawful to the Children of Israel before the revelation of the Torah. Therefore bring the Torah and read it if you are truthful in your claim. (*All food was lawful … if you are truthful.*) But if you refuse to do so, then you must admit that you have fabricated a lie against God

and that you are unjust. (*Then whoever fabricates a lie against Allah after this, these it is that are the unjust*.) It will prove to you that I am truthful in my mission. You should therefore follow my religion which is the religion of Abraham, the upright one; (*Say: Allah has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one; and he was not one of the polytheists.)*

The exegetes have variously explained these verses—each in his own way. But all have said that the verses aim to refute the objection of the Jews concerning abrogation—as we have said above.

The strangest explanation (given by one of them) is as follows:

> "The verse replies to a Jewish objection regarding abrogation. It appears that the Jews had said: 'O Muḥammad! If you are, as you claim, on the religion of Abraham and the succeeding prophets, then how is it that you have allowed, for example, camel meat that was forbidden to him and them? And now that you have made lawful what was unlawful to them, you should not claim that you affirm their truth and are on their religion; nor should you especially mention Abraham.'
>
> "The reply runs as follows: 'Every food was lawful to all people including the Children of Israel. But the Children of Israel had forbidden some things to themselves by indulging into sins and evils, as God says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them …*' (4:160). Therefore, the word, 'Israel' , refers to the whole nation, to all the Children of Israel, not to Israel (Jacob) alone. And such usage in tribes' names is common. The clause, 'Israel had forbidden to himself' , actually means that the Children of Israel indulged in injustice and committed sins, as a result of which God forbade it to them. The clause, 'before the Torah was revealed', qualifies the preceding verb, 'Israel had forbidden to himself'; that is, what the Israelites had forbidden to themselves before the revelation of the Torah. If we take, 'Israel', to mean Jacob alone, then this clause (*before the Torah was revealed*) would be superfluous, because everybody knows that Jacob had preceded the revelation of the Torah."

This is the gist of what he has written. Someone else has given the same explanation with one difference. He writes:

> "The clause, 'that which Israel had forbidden to himself', means

that the Children of Israel had themselves forbidden those things to themselves, making laws of their own, without any revelation from God; in the same way as the Arabs of pre-Islamic days were doing and which God has mentioned in the Qur'an."

Both exegetes have strained the words to an intolerable limit, which no knowledgeable person would agree with. They have diverted the whole talk from its proper line. Actually, they were misled in this way because they thought that the clause, "before the Torah was revealed," was related to the clause, "Israel had forbidden"—while in fact it qualifies the words in the beginning, "All food was lawful"; and the exception clause, "except that which Israel had forbidden to himself," is just a parenthetical clause.

Consequently, there is no reason why "Israel" should be interpreted as "the Children of Israel," as they have done, thinking that without it the verse could not be explained!

Now we come to the usage of tribes' names. It is true that the Arabs say, Bakr, Taghlib, Nizār and ʿAdnān, when they actually mean, the children of Bakr, the children of Taghlib, the children of Nizār and the children of ʿAdnān, respectively. But we have never seen them—at the time when the Qur'an was revealed—using "Israel" for "the Children of Israel". Nor has the Qur'an used this word in that sense anywhere else; although it has mentioned "the Children of Israel" in about forty places, including this very verse: *All food was lawful to the Children of Israel—except that which Israel had forbidden to himself.*

Let us ask them one thing: What is the difference (according to their explanation) between the two clauses? The Qur'an refers to them first as "the Children of Israel" and then immediately after that as "Israel". Why this change if both words mean the same? If their explanation is correct, then was it not necessary to use the same word in both places, lest there be any confusion? And confusion was bound to occur; because, from the point of view of these two writers, the whole lot of the exegetes was miled into thinking that Israel refers to Jacob, not to his children!

The best proof to show that the name "Israel" refers to Jacob alone, is the singular masculine pronoun, "to himself," used for "Israel". Had "Israel" stood for "the tribe of Israel" or "the Children of Israel," it was essential to say "to itself" or "to themselves".

Say: Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful: So that it may be seen who is right, I or you. God guides His Prophet to reply them in this way.

فَمَنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

(3:94) ***Then whoever fabricates a lie against Allah after this, these it is that are the unjust.***

Apparently it is God's talk addressed to His Prophet; accordingly, the aim is to strengthen and gladden the Prophet's heart, by declaring that it is his enemies, the Jews, who are the unjust, because they fabricate lies against God. It is an indirect adverse allusion to the Jews.

There is another syntactical possibility: It may be a continuation of the reply given to the Jews by the Prophet, although the second person singular pronoun used in the demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* (this) does not fit this explanation. However, according to this explanation too, the sentence would be just veiled aside, giving the vanquished adversary a chance to save his face—because it does not clearly say that the Jews are the unjust ones. Putting the matter in general terms gives the enemy an opportunity to surrender gracefully.

It is the same style that has been used in the following verse which says: *And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error* (34:24).

The demonstrative pronoun, "this," in *after this* points to the explanation and proof offered to the Jews.

Why has this proviso, "after this," been added here? Is not he, who fabricates a lie against God, unjust in all circumstances? The fact is that he cannot be called unjust until proof has been clearly explained to him as some scholars have said. However, the sentence, "these it is that are the unjust," is an exclusive one, and it implies that such fabricators cannot be but unjust.

قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ ۗ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

(3:95) ***Say: Allah has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one; and he was not one of the polytheists.***

As the truth is on my side (in what I have told you and called you to), you should follow my religion; also you should admit that camel meat, for example, is a good thing made lawful by God, and that God had forbidden it to you as a punishment for your injustice and transgression—as He has said.

The clause, "therefore follow the religion of Abraham," is a sort of

indirect invitation to follow the Prophet's religion. It was not mentioned directly because: first, the Jews affirmed the truth of Abraham's religion; secondly, the present wording shows that the religion to which they are invited is the upright and natural one—after all, nature does not prevent man from eating good sustenance given by God, including meat.

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Examining Narrations

(1) (Imam) al-Ṣādiq said: "Whenever Israel (Jacob) ate camel meat, he felt throbbing of pain in his sides. Therefore, he forbade camel meat to himself. And it was (long) before the revelation of the Torah. When the Torah was revealed, (Moses) neither forbade it, nor ate it." (*al-Kāfī; al-Tafsīr,* al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: An almost similar tradition is narrated through the Sunnī chains. The verbs in the clause, *neither for bade it nor ate it,* refer to Moses whose name, although not mentioned, is clearly understood. The verb, *lam yaʾkulhu* (did not eat it) may alternatively be read from the paradigm *al-tafʿīl*' as *lam yuʾakkilhu* (did not feed it, that is, did not tell them to eat it). The dictionary, *Tāj al-ʿArūs,* says that the verb *al-akl* (to eat) when conjugated on the paradigms of *al-tafʿīl* and *al-mufāʿalah* has the same meaning. It means that *al-taʾkīl* (to feed) and *al-muʾākalah* (to eat together) have the same connotation.

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Verses 96–97

The two verses are in reply to another objection which the Jews were putting to the believers, because of the "Abrogation". Their target, this time, was the change of *qiblah* from Baytu al-Maqdis to the Kaʿbah. We have explained under the verse 2:144 (… *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque* …) that the change of *qiblah* was a very important matter which had profound effect, materially as well as spiritually, on the People of the Book, especially the Jews; apart from the fact that it offended their views about abrogation. That is why they vehemently objected to it and contentions and conflicts between them and the Muslims continued for a long time after the change of *qiblah*.

It may be inferred from the verses that they had combined two elements in their objection: their aversion to abrogation, and a denial that the new direction of *qiblah* had anything to do with Abraham. How could the Kaʿbah be considered the *qiblah* of Abraham, when God had appointed Baytu al-Maqdis as *qiblah?* This new rule entails abrogation of Abraham's law—admittedly the true religion—when we know that abrogation is impossible and void.

The verse deals with it as follows: The Kaʿbah was appointed as the House of worship long before other houses like Baytu al-Maqdis were built. Undoubtedly it was Abraham who built it and dedicated it for Divine Worship; there are many clear signs, like the standing place of Abraham, which prove this fact. Baytu al-Maqdis, on the other hand, was built by Solomon[1] who came centuries after Abraham.

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِى بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾

(3:96) ***Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for the worlds.***

Meaning of house is well-known; that the Kaʿbah was appointed for men, means that it was dedicated in order that people should worship God in that place. It was a means of Divine Worship, helping men and making

1 It was founded by David and completed by Solomon. (Trans.)

it easier for them to pray to God, by journey to, or facing towards it; and in various ways turning their attention to Him. All this may be inferred from the phrase "blessed and a guidance for the worlds". Also the expression "one at Bakkah" hints at it. The word *bakkah* means gathering of people, and its use here points to the fact that there is always a large gathering of people therein who are engaged in circumambulation, prayer and other rites of worship.

The wording however does not show that the Kaʿbah was the first House built on the earth or appointed for the benefit of men.

Bakkah—refers to the land on which the Kaʿbah stands; it has been given this name because there is always a huge gathering of people there. There are also other explanations:

(2) Bakkah is Mecca, the letter *'m'* has been changed to *'b'*, as it has been done in *lāzim* and *rātim* or *lāzib* and *rātib*.
(3) It is a name of the Meccan Sanctuary.
(4) The name of the Sacred Mosque.
(5) The area of circumambulation.

Al-Mubārakah is on the paradigm of *al-mufāʿalah* from the root word *al-barakah* (abundant good); it has been translated here as 'blessed'; it means bestowal of abundant good on the House, making it blessed. Abundant good covers good of both worlds; but in this verse it has been put face to face with the phrase "A guidance for the worlds" and it indicates that the blessing refers to worldly good. The best of such blessings are abundance of sustenance in Mecca, and deep yearning of people to go there for pilgrimage, to present themselves there and to keep it in highest regard. In other words, it would show the fulfillment of Abraham's prayer:

O our Lord! surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley, uncultivable, near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! that they may establish prayers; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful (14:37).

The Kaʿbah is a guidance, as it shows the people the way to their happiness in the hereafter, leads them to nobility and Divine Nearness; because, God has designated it for worship, and has prescribed various prayers, acts of worship and rituals to be performed there; also, it has remained the longed for destination of believers and a place of worship for worshippers.

The Qur'an shows that it was in Abraham's time—after he had completed the construction of the Kaʿbah—that pilgrimage was prescribed for the first time: God says: *And We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael (saying):*

Purify (you two) My House for those who make circuit and those who abide (in it for devotion) and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves (2:125). And He had enjoined Abraham as follows: *And proclaim among men the Ḥajj; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path* (22:27). This verse clearly says that this call, this cry, would surely be answered with general acceptance by the people from near and afar, from various clans and tribes.

Also the Qur'an proves that this divinely-initiated "symbol" was firmly established and quite well-known in the days of Shuʿayb (Jethro). God quotes him as saying to Moses: *I desire to marry one of these two daughters of mine to you on condition that you should serve me for eight years* (lit.: pilgrimages); *but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will* (28:27). He used the word "pilgrimages" for "years". There can be only one explanation for it: the years were counted in terms of pilgrimage, as it happened every year.

Also there are many points in Abraham's invocation which show that the House all the time served as a worship centre, was a symbol of guidance. (For detail see ch. 14—Ibrahīm).

The Arabs even in the days of ignorance, held the House in reverence and performed its pilgrimage, rightly believing it to be a part of Abraham's shariah. History says that other nations too accorded respect to it. This in itself is a sort of guidance because it fixes man's mind on remembrance of God. So far as the period after the advent of Islam is concerned, Kaʿbah's guidance needs no elaboration. Its fame encompasses the East and the West. The Kaʿbah is always present in people's minds and hearts. The Muslims turn to it every where and at all times: during worship and prayer, while standing or sitting, for slaughtering animals and in a number of other religious affairs.

In this way, the House is a guidance (with all stages of guiding), be it just attention of mind or complete surrender to God—the stage which may be attained only by the purified servants of God—from among those who are free of sin and error.

Moreover, it guides the Muslim's world to their worldly blessings, because it unifies their goal, unites the *ummah* and opens for them avenues of benefit and profit. Also it is a guidance for the others, because it makes them appreciate the fruits of this unity and they realize how beneficial it is to unite all separate forces together.

It appears from the above that:

First: The Kaʿbah is a guidance to the happiness of this world and the next; and it encompasses all the stages of guidance. In short, the guidance is general and unconditional.

Second: It is a guidance for the whole world, not for a particular world or special group like the progeny of Abraham, or the Arabs, or the Muslims. It is because of unrestricted guidance.

فِيهِ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ مَقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۖ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ آمِنًا ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا ۚ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

(3:97) ***In it are clear signs, the standing place of Abraham; and whoever enters it shall be secure; and for the sake of Allah, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men, (upon) every one who can afford the journey to it, and whoever disbelieves, then surely Allah is Self-sufficient (independent) of the worlds.***

The "signs" are qualified by the adjective "clear," it particularizes the signs to a certain extent. Yet the ambiguity, the vagueness remains. But the context demands that the distinctions and special qualities of the House be clearly shown, in order that the audience may know why it has got precedence over all other houses of worship. It requires definitive description of its distinctions, free from ambiguous expression or vague depiction. Looking from this angle, it becomes clear that the next phrases and clauses have been put there as classifications of the "clear signs". What are the clear signs? They are the standing place of Abraham, its being a sanctuary and place of safety, and obligation of its pilgrimage for those who can afford.

But it does not mean that the three clauses are in *ʿaṭf al-bayān* (explicative apposition) to the phrase "clear signs" or serve as its *al-badal* (substitute). Otherwise it would require reconstruction of all the sentences. For example, it will have to be rewritten as follows: "These signs are the standing place of Abraham, and safety for those who enter it, and its pilgrimage for him who may afford the journey." Thus we will have to reduce a whole sentence (*whoever enters it shall be secure*) to a single word "security" (it makes no difference whether we take that sentence as an imperative or a declarative one), and to change the imperative sentence (*and for the sake*

of Allah, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent …) into a declarative one and then setting it in conjunction with the preceding sentence; and this too will have to be reduced to a single word. Alternatively we will have to add *An* of *maṣdar* before both sentences. But the context does not agree with all these alterations.

The fact is that the three sentences are independent; each has a certain connotation—either declarative or imperative—and all three together describe the clear signs. It is as we say: Zayd is a noble man; he is the son of a great father; his house is always open to guests; and we should follow in his footsteps. (Thus the three independent sentences explain the nobility of Zayd.)

…the standing place of Abraham: It is a subject with its predicate omitted; the complete sentence would be, "There is in it the standing place of Abraham." It is the stone that has the imprint of the feet of Abraham. It is reported that the stone is fixed in the place now called *Maqāmu Ibrahim* (standing place of Abraham) on the periphery of the circumambulation area[1], facing *al-Multazam* (the Kaʿbah's wall between its door and the Black Stone). It is this stone that Abū Ṭālib, the uncle of the Prophet, refers to in his well-known poem:

> And the footprints of Abraham in the stone identify,
> *With his* (that is, Muḥammad's) *feet—when they are bare.*

Sometimes this phrase gives the idea that there is in the House—or the House itself—the place where Abraham stood or stayed for Divine Worship.

Another syntactical possibility: We may say that the implied sentence is as follows, 'In it are clear signs, and they are the standing place of Abraham, and security and pilgrimage'; but the last words (that is, 'and security and pilgrimage') have been omitted for brevity because the next sentences allude to them. The next sentences, (*and whoever enters it, and for the sake of Allah, pilgrimage...*) give imperative connotation, but are constructed as declarative ones.

This verse, therefore, shows one of the wonderful Qur'anic styles: It uses a talk (which has its own theme)—to serve another purpose—it is placed in such a way as to point to the other meaning too. Thus one sentence serves two purposes without sacrificing either connotation. For

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1 Now it is enclosed in a hemispherical glass through which the imprints may be seen. (Trans.)

example, sometimes it puts direct quotation in an indirect narration: *… everyone of them believes in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers: We make no difference between any of His messengers* (2:285). Two examples are found in the verse 2:258 (*Did you not see him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord)* and also 2:259 (*Or like him who passed by a town, and it had fallen down upon its roofs)*; and we have pointed to this in the Commentary of the second verse. Other examples are seen in 26:88–89 (*The day on which neither property will avail, nor sons, except him who comes to Allah with a heart submissive*); and also 2:177 (*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces … , but righteousness is the one who)* wherein *righteousness* has been used for "righteous"; the same modality is seen in 2:171 (*And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out to that which hears not more than a call and a cry*). This modality is used in most of the Qur'anic parables.

The modality used in this verse, *In it are clear signs … independent of the worlds,* which frequently switches from declarative to imperative mood and back, is the same as that employed in the verses: *And remember Our servants Job, when he called upon his Lord: The Satan has afflicted me with weariness and torment. Stamp your foot, here is a cool washing place and a drink. And We gave him his family and the like of them with them, as a mercy from Us, and as a reminder to those possessed of understanding. And take in your hand a bundle of rushes and beat her with it and do not break your oath; surely We found him patient; most excellent the servant! Surely he was frequent in returning (to God)* (38:41–44).

However, the explanation given above is totally different from that given by some people who speak in term of explicative apposition, and which we have rejected earlier. If one thinks it necessary to treat it as an explicative apposition, then it is far better to treat only one phrase "the Standing Place of Abraham," in this way; and treat the next two sentences as independent ones, which by their meanings point to other two explicative appositions which are deleted for brevity—as we have done. The completed sentence then would be as follows: In it are clear signs, the Standing Place of Abraham, and the security of the visitor, and the pilgrimage of one who can afford it.

There is no doubt whatsoever that each of the above-mentioned things is a clear sign that leads to God and reminds one of His majesty. What is a sign? It is a thing that points to something else. And there is no sign that may lead to God, may remind His servants of His majesty, greater and

clearer in people's eyes than the Standing Place of Abraham, the sanctuary that provides security to the one who enters it, and the worship and rites which are performed by millions of people year after year and which the alternations of days and nights cannot set aside.

It should be made clear that it is not necessary for a "sign" to be a super-natural thing that should contradict the normal system of nature; neither miraculousness is a part of this word's meaning, nor its use in the Qur'an is confined to this sense. God says: *Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it* (2:106). No doubt, abrogated laws of the shariah are included in the meaning of the word, "signs," here. Also He says: *Do you build on every height a monument* (lit. sign)? *Vain is it that you do* (26:128). There are many such verses in the Qur'an.

Now you may see how untenable is the position of those who say that only the Standing Place of Abraham is a "clear sign," and that the security and the pilgrimage are not related in any way to the "clear signs".

The same is the position of those who insist that the phrase "clear signs" refers to various special characteristics of the Kaʿbah. (We do not think it necessary to quote them here; whoever so desires, should refer to some detailed books of exegesis.) Such an explanation takes it for granted that "signs" means miraculous and super-natural things; but as we have explained just now, there is no evidence to prove it.

The fact is that the sentence "Whoever enters it shall be secure," points to a legislative law, not to any creative characteristic. Apparently it is a declarative sentence which refers to a law that was in force since long and had made the House a place of security. This may be inferred from the invocation of Abraham quoted in the ch.14 (Ibrahīm) and ch. 2 (The Cow). This right of sanctuary was recognized even by the Arabs of pre-Islamic era, and its origin may be traced to Abraham's days.

Some exegetes have said: The sentence declares that violence and upheaval, turmoil and turbulence cannot happen in, or reach, the sanctuary. But experience refutes this explanation; we know how many battles and wars were fought in that area; how much distance and violence had occurred there—and especially before this verse was revealed. Also the verse 29:67 (*Do they not see that We have made a sacred territory secure, while men are carried off by force from around them?*) does not show any creative security inherent in the nature of Kaʿbah. It only points to the fact that safety and security surrounded the sacred area, because people

respected the sanctity of the House and accorded it full honor as it was established by the shariah of Abraham; thus ultimately it depends on Divine Legislation, on the law ordained by God.

This view is further supported by the invocations of Abraham as he implored God: *My Lord! make this city secure* (14:35); *My Lord! make it a secure town* (2:126). He prayed to God to make Mecca a secure town, and God answered his prayer by promulgating a law to that effect and implanting acceptance of this law in people's hearts so that they could continue respecting this sanctuary generation after generation.

...and for the sake of Allah, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men, (upon) every one who can afford the journey to it: *al-Ḥijj* which has also been recited *al-ḥajj,* literally means, to intend, to aim; then it was reserved for intention of, or repairing to, the House in a particular manner laid down by the shariah; *sabīlan* (lit.: way; translated here as, the journey) is *al-Tamyīz* (accusative of specification) related to the verb "can afford".

The verse approvingly describes the institution of *ḥajj* as a law that was ordained for the shariah of Abraham; as God describes in the verse 22:27, where He mentions His order to Abraham: *And proclaim among men the Ḥajj; they will come to you …* It appears from the above, that the modality of the sentence "And for the sake of God …" is the same as that of the preceding one "And whoever enters it shall be secure". Each is a declarative sentence which approvingly describes a previously ordained law. Alternatively it is possible to treat both as imperative sentences meant to reconfirm the two Abrahamic laws. But the context obviously supports the first explanation.

...and whoever disbelieves, then surely Allah is Self-sufficient (independent) of the worlds: Disbelief, in this verse, means disbelieving in a law, in a branch of religion; like the disbelief resulting from neglect of prayer or *zakāt*. The word in this context means neglecting the important law of *ḥajj*. In this clause, the effect has been used to describe the reason; in other words it says, 'Whoever neglects *ḥajj* becomes a disbeliever.' On the other hand, the clause "God is Self-sufficient" puts the reason in place of effect; that is, he will not cause any harm to God because God is Self-sufficient. The full sentence, therefore, means as follows: Whoever neglects *ḥajj* becomes a disbeliever, but he, by his disbelief, cannot harm God in any way because God is Self-sufficient and independent of the worlds.

Examining Narrations

(1) Ibn Shahrāshūb narrates from the Leader of the Faithful (ʿAlī) about the words of God, *Most surely the first house appointed for men...*, as follows:
"A man asked him whether it was the first house (built). He said: 'No. Surely there were houses (built) before it, but it is the first House appointed for men, blessed, in which there is guidance, mercy and blessing. And it was Abraham who first built it; then an Arabian group from the (tribe of) Jurhum built it, then it was demolished, so the al-ʿAmāliqah rebuilt it; again it fell down and then the Quraysh rebuilt it.' "

(2) Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated through the chain of al-Shaʿbī, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, that he said, explaining this verse: "There were houses before that; but it was the first House made for the worship of God." (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: al-Suyūṭī has also narrated a similar tradition through Ibn Jarīr from Maṭar (b. Ṭuhmān). And there are numerous traditions of the same theme.

(3) al-Ṣādiq said: "The land on which the House stands is Bakkah; and the town is Mecca." (*ʿIlal al-sharāyiʿ*)
The same book quotes the same Imam as saying: "Bakkah was named Bakkah because people are crowded therein."[1]

(4) al-Bāqir said: "Mecca is called Bakkah because men and women are crowded therein; a woman prays in front of you, and on your right, and on your left, and with you, and there is no harm in it (at that place); but surely it is disliked in all other towns." (*ibid.*)

(5) The same Imam said: "When God intended to create the earth, He ordered the winds and they agitated the face of water until it produced waves (and) then brought up foam (and froth); so (all of) it became one foam. Then God gathered it in the place of the House (that is, where the House now stands) and made it a mountain of foam; thereafter He spread out the earth from beneath it. And this is the (meaning of the) words of God: *Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah, blessed.* Thus the first plot created of the earth is the Kaʿbah; then the earth was

1 *Yabakkūn* (= they are crowded) (Auth.)

expanded from it." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: "There are numerous traditions saying that the earth was expanded and extended from beneath the Kaʿbah. There is nothing against the Qur'an in these traditions. Nor is there any rational reason to refute it—except the ancient philosophers' theory that the earth was an eternal indivisible element; but that theory has so manifestly been proved wrong that it needs no further exposition.

This narrative explains how and why the Kaʿbah was the first House (that is, piece of land) of the earth—from traditions' point of view. But so far as the obvious meaning of the verse is concerned, it supports the first two traditions.

(6) al-Ṣādiq was asked what were the clear signs mentioned in the verse: *In it are clear signs.* He said: "The Standing Place of Abraham—where he stood upon the stone and his feet left their prints in it, and the Black Stone, and the House of Ishmael" (*al-Kāfī; al-Tafsīr,* al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: There are other traditions of the same meaning. Perhaps the Imam mentioned them as examples, although some of them are not mentioned in the verse.

(7) ʿAbd al-Ṣamad said: "Abū Jaʿfar (al-Manṣūr) wanted to buy from (some) Meccans their houses in order to extend the (Sacred) Mosque; but they refused. Then he induced them; they still resisted. So he was frustrated. Then he came to Abū ʿAbdillāh and said to him: 'I requested these people (to sell to us) some of their houses and compounds, so that we could extend the Mosque; but they have refused; and it has put me into utmost grief.' Abū ʿAbdillāh said: 'Why does it grieve you and your proof against them is (very) clear?' He said: And what should I argue against them with?' (The Imam) said: 'With the Book of God.' He said: 'In which place (is it explained)?' (The Imam) said: 'The words of God: *Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah.* And God has informed you (in this verse) that the first House appointed for the men is the one that is at Bakkah. Now if they had taken the possession (of the land) before the House (was built) then their plots would belong to them; but if the House was there before them, then it (the Kaʿbah) owns its plot.' Abū Jaʿfar then called them and argued with them accordingly. Thereupon they said: 'Do whatever you want.' " (*al-Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī)

(8) al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. al-Nuʿmān says: "When al-Mahdī built (that is, extended) the Sacred Mosque, there remained there one house (because of which) the Mosque could not be made square. He asked for it from its owners; but they refused. He asked jurists about it, and all of them told him that he should not include in the Sacred Mosque anything taken by force. Then ʿAlī b. Yaqṭīn said: 'O leader of the faithful! I am writing(a letter) to Moses b. Jaʿfar (peace be on them both), so that I may tell you what the proper ruling is in this matter.' So he wrote to the Governor of Medina to ask Musa b. Jaʿfar (peace be on them both) about the house which we wanted to include in the Sacred Mosque but its owners refused (to sell it)—how this problem could be solved? (The Governor) told Abu al-Ḥasan (Musa b. Jaʿfar—peace be on them both) about it. Abu al-Ḥasan said: 'Is it necessary to give its reply?' He said: '(Yes), it is a matter that is necessary.' Then (the Imam) said to him: 'Write down: "In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, if the Kaʿbah had settled down with the people, then the people have more rights on its courtyard; but if the people have settled down around the Kaʿbah, then the Kaʿbah has more right over its courtyard." ' When the letter reached al-Mahdī, he took it and kissed it, then he ordered to demolish the (said) house. The house owners then came to Abu al-Ḥasan and requested him to write a letter to al-Mahdī regarding the price of the house. He wrote to him to give them something, so he made them happy." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: The two traditions contain a very fine point of argument. It was Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr who began the extension of the Sacred Mosque which was completed during al-Mahdī's reign.

(9) al-Ṣādiq said about the words of God, and for the sake of Allah, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent "(God) means by it the *ḥajj* and the *ʿumrah* both, because both are obligatory." (*al-Kāfī*)

Author's comment: al-ʿAyyāshī too has narrated it in his *al-Tafsīr*.

This tradition takes the word *ḥijj* in its literal sense, that is, to proceed to.

(10) al-Ṣādiq has explained the word, *and whoever disbelieves*, as "whoever neglects". (*al-Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī)

Author's comment: al-Shaykh has narrated this tradition in *at-Tahdhīb.* We have explained it earlier that disbelief, like belief, has many grades;

and that the word, as used in this verse, means disbelieving in—that is, not complying with—a commandment of the shariah.

(11) ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar narrates from his brother Mūsā, a tradition in which he, inter alia, says: "I said: 'Then whoever among us does not go for *ḥajj,* is an unbeliever?' (The Imam) said: 'No. But whoever says that it is not so (that is, it is not obligatory) becomes an unbeliever.' " (*al-Kāfī*)

Author's comment: There are many traditions of the same theme. Disbelief, as explained in this tradition, means rejection and refutation, and the verse could mean it. Thus disbelief has been used here in its literal meaning, that is, hiding the truth; and it may refer to various grades of disbelief according to various situations.

A Short History of the Kaʿbah

It is *mutawātir* and definitely known that it was (Prophet) Abraham (*al-Khalīl*) who built the Kaʿbah. The residents around it at that time were his son, Ishmael, and the tribe of Jurhum (originally from Yemen). It is an almost square building whose sides face the cardinal points of the compass; the winds, no matter how strong, lose their force when they strike it—without doing it any harm.

The construction of Abraham stood intact, until it was rebuilt by al-ʿAmāliqah, and later by the tribe of Jurhum (or vice versa), as has been described in the earlier narrated tradition of the Leader of the Faithful (ʿAlī).

When the management of the Kaʿbah came into the hands of Quṣayy b. Kilāb—an ancestor of the Prophet—in the second century before hijrah, he demolished and rebuilt it on firm foundation, putting a roof of doom palm timber and date-palm trunk on it. He also built *Dār al-Nadwah* (Council House) on one side. It was the place from where he ruled and where he held counsel with his colleagues. Then he divided various sides of the Kaʿbah among different clans of the Quraysh and each clan built their houses at the side allotted to them; and they opened their doors towards the Kaʿbah.

Five years before the start of the Prophet's mission, there came a flood which destroyed the Kaʿbah's building. The Quraysh divided among themselves the various responsibilities connected with its reconstruction. They hired a Roman mason to build it and an Egyptian carpenter to help him with the woodwork. When the time came to fix the Black Stone, a

dispute erupted as to which clan should be accorded the honor of putting the Black Stone in its place. Then they agreed to leave the decision to Muḥammad, who at that time was thirty-five years old—because they had full faith in his deep wisdom and sound judgment. He got his robe, and putting the Stone on it, told all the clans to hold the sides of the robe and raise it together. When the Stone reached the required height (on the eastern corner), he took it in his hands and fixed it in its proper place.

But the Quraysh found their funds exhausted. So they reduced the size on one side—as it is today; thus a part of the original foundation was left out, and that is the portion known as *Ḥijr Ismāʿīl* (the Enclosure of Ishmael).

The building remained in that condition until ʿAbdullāh b. al-Zubayr established his rule over Ḥijāz during the reign of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah. Ḥusayn b. Numayr, the commander of Yazīd's army, besieged him at Mecca and struck the Kaʿbah with catapult. The Kaʿbah was demolished, the *al-Kiswah* (covering of the Kaʿbah) and some roof timbers were burnt down. The siege was lifted when news came of Yazīd's death. Ibn al-Zubayr decided to demolish the Kaʿbah completely and rebuild it on its original foundation. He got good mortar from Yemen and constructed the new building. *Ḥijr Ismāʿīl* was re-included in the Kaʿbah; the door was fixed at the level of the ground; another door was fixed on the opposite side, so that people might enter from one door and go out from the other. He fixed the height of the House at twenty-seven arms. When the building was ready, he covered the whole building with musk and perfume inside out, and put silken *Kiswah* on it. The construction was completed on 17th Rajab, 64 A.H.

When ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān came to power in Damascus, he sent his commander, Ḥajjāj b. Yusuf, who defeated Ibn al-Zubayr and killed him. Entering the Sacred Mosque, he saw what Ibn al-Zubayr had done regarding the Kaʿbah. He wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik about it who ordered him to return it to its previous shape. Ḥajjāj, therefore, demolished six and a half arms from the northern side and rebuilt it according to the plan of the Quraysh; he raised the eastern door and closed the western one; he also filled the inside with the stones that could not be re-used (thus raising the inside floor to the new level of the door).

When the Ottoman Sultan Sulaymān ascended the throne in 960 A.H., he changed the roof of the Kaʿbah. Sultan Aḥmad (who came to power in 1021 A.H.) made some other repairs and alterations. Then came the great

flood of 1039 A.H. which demolished parts of its northern, eastern and western walls. Therefore, the Ottoman Sultan Murād IV got it repaired. And the same building continues till this day and it is the year 1375 by lunar *hijri* calendar, and 1338 according to the solar one.

The Shape of the Kaʿbah: The Kaʿbah is nearly square in shape, built with hard dark bluish-grey stones. It now rises to sixteen metres; but was much lower at the time of the Prophet as may be inferred from the fact that, on the day of conquest of Mecca, the Prophet raised ʿAlī on his shoulders so that ʿAlī could remove and break the idols that were placed on the roof of the Kaʿbah.

The wall (the northern one that faces the Enclosure of Ishmael and) over which is placed the water trough and the one on its opposite side (the southern one) are ten metres and ten centimeters long; while the (eastern) wall which has the door and the one opposite to it are twelve metres long. The door is placed at a height of two metres from the ground level. The Black Stone is fixed in the (east-south) corner, so that if one wants to enter the door, the Stone would be on his left. This Stone is one and a half metres above the ground level, that is, above the level of the circumambulation area. The Black Stone is a hard rock of irregular oval shape, black with some reddish tint; it has red dots and yellow wavy lines which appeared when some broken pieces were soldered and joined. It has a diameter of about thirty centimeters.

The Kaʿbah's corners, since ancient days, are called *al-arkān* pl. of *al-Rukn* (pillar); the northern one is called, the Iraqī *rukn;* the western, the Syrian; the southern, the Yemenite; and the eastern (wherein the Black Stone is fixed), is named the Black. The area between the door and the Black Stone is called *al-Multazam* (lit.: the place where one clings to) because when one circumambulates one adheres to it for invocation and prayer.

The trough fixed over the northern wall, which is called the Trough of Mercy, was an innovation of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yusuf; in 954 A.H. Sultan Sulaymān changed that with a silver one; that too was replaced by Sultan Aḥmad in 1021 A.H. with another one of enamelled silver with golden designs. In 1273 A.H. Sultan ʿAbd al-Majīd replaced it with another one made of gold, and it is the present one.

Facing the northern wall is a wall—half circle in shape. It is called, al-Ḥaṭīm. It is like a bow whose two ends face the northern (Iraqī) and the

western (Syrian) *rukns*; there is a gap of two metres and three centimeters between the ends of the bow and the said *rukns*. The wall, al-Ḥaṭīm, is one metre high and one and a half metres wide. It is panelled with carved marble. The distance between the centre of al-Ḥaṭīm and the centre of the northern wall of the Kaʿbah is eight metres and forty-four centimeters. The area covered by al-Ḥaṭīm and the northern wall is known as *Ḥijr Ismāʿīl* (Enclosure of Ishmael). About three metres of this space was included in the Kaʿbah built by Abraham ; and the remaining area was the pen for sheep of Hājirah and her son. It is said that Hājirah and Ishmael are buried in the same Enclosure.

The changes and alterations that were done inside the Kaʿbah, and the rituals and *sunnah* rites connected with the House are not so necessary to be described here.

The Covering of the Kaʿbah: We have described, in the chapter of 'The Cow', in the traditions relating the story of Hājirah and Ishmael and their settlement at Mecca, that Hājirah hang her mantle as a curtain on the door of the Kaʿbah when its construction was completed.

As for the covering of the House itself, it is said that the first to cover it was the Tubbaʿ[1] Abū Bakr Asʿad, who hang on it the sheets embroidered with silver threads. His successors followed this custom. Then people started covering it with sheets of various kinds—putting one upon the other. Whenever a covering looked old, a new one was put over it. This continued until Quṣayy came on the scene. He imposed a tax on the Arabs for putting a new covering every year. This system continued in his descendants. Abū Rabīʿah b. al-Mughīrah used to put a covering one year and all the clans of Quraysh did so the next year.

The Prophet covered the House with Yemenite sheets. This custom continued. When the ʿAbbāside caliph al-Mahdī went for pilgrimage, the attendants of the House complained to him about the coverings that had accumulated on the roof of the Kaʿbah. They said there was a danger of the roof collapsing down because of that load. The King ordered that all the old coverings should be removed and that every year a new covering should replace the old one—and that custom is followed until now.

The Kaʿbah is draped from inside too. The first to do so was the mother of ʿAbbās, son of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib—she had done so because of a vow

1 Tubbaʿ—was the title of the Kings of Yemen. (Trans.)

she had taken regarding her son—ʿAbbās.

Prestige of the Kaʿbah: The Kaʿbah was held in high esteem by various nations. The Hindus respected it, believing that the spirit of Siva, the third person of their Trimurty, entered into the Black Stone, when he was accompanied by his wife visited Ḥijāz.

The Sabaeans of Persia and Chaledonia counted it as one of their seven holy sanctuaries[1]. Many of them said that it was the House of the Saturn—because it was the most ancient, and the longest in existence.

The Persians too respected the Kaʿbah, believing that the spirit of Hormoz was present therein; they sometimes went for its pilgrimage.

The Jews honored it and worshipped God there according to the religion of Abraham. There were many pictures and images in the Kaʿbah, including those of Abraham and Ishmael which had divining arrows in their hands. Also there were pictures of the virgin Mary and Christ—which indicates that the Christians too respected the Kaʿbah like the Jews.

The Arabs held it in the highest esteem; they believed that it was the House of God, and came to its pilgrimage from every place. They believed the Kaʿbah to be built by Abraham and the *ḥajj* to be a part of his religion which had come to them as his legacy.

Trusteeship of the Kaʿbah: The trusteeship was in the hands of Ishmael; and after him it remained in his descendants. Then the Jurhumites became more powerful and took over the trusteeship. They in their turn were vanquished after several wars by the ʿAmāliqah, who were a part of Banū Karkar. The ʿAmāliqah resided at the lower section of Mecca while the Jurhumites had settled in its upper section. They had their own Kings. Later on, the Jurhumites defeated the ʿAmāliqah and regained the trusteeship, which remained with them for about three hundred years.

They extended the area of the House and increased its height.

Gradually the Ishmaelites grew in number and gained power; and they found the place too congested and over-populated. Then they fought the Jurhumites, defeated and expelled them from Mecca. The leader of

1 The seven sanctuaries were: (1) The Kaʿbah; (2) Mars—on the summit of a mountain in Iṣfahān; (3) *Mandūsān?* in India; (4) Naw Bahār in Balkh; (5) House of Ghamdān in Sanʿā; (6) Kawsān in Farghānā, Khurāsān; and (7) a House in Upper China. (Auth.)

the Ishmaelites at that time was ʿAmr b. Laḥiyy, the chief of the clan of Khuzāʿah. He became over-lord of Mecca and took over the trusteeship of the Kaʿbah. It was he who put idols in the Kaʿbah and called people to worship them. The first idol he put there was Hubal which he had brought from Syria; then he brought others. Gradually there were a lot of idols, and idol-worship spread among the Arabs; the upright religion of Abraham was discarded.

Shaḥnah b. Khalaf al-Jurhumī refers to this episode, when he addresses ʿAmr b. Laḥiyy in the following ode:

> O ʿAmr! you have invented various gods; At Mecca—idols around the House.
> And there was for the House One Lord from ever;
> But you have made for it several lords (which are now worshipped) by the people.
> Surely you should know that God is in no hurry;
> Soon He will choose for (His) House stewards other than you.

The trusteeship remained in the clan of Khuzāʿah up to the time of Ḥalīl al-Khuzāʿī. He nominated his daughter (who was married to Quṣayy b. Kilāb) to succeed him, and gave the right of opening and closing the door to a man from his clan, Abū Ghabshān al-Khuzāʿī by name. Abū Ghabshān sold his right to Quṣayy b. Kilāb for a camel and a skinful of liquor. The proverb, "More loss incurring than the deal of Abū Ghabshān," alludes to this sale.

The trusteeship was thus transferred to the Quraysh. Quṣayy rebuilt the House, as we have mentioned above. The things continued as they were, until the Prophet conquered Mecca, and entering the Kaʿbah ordered the pictures to be effaced, and the idols to be thrown down and broken.

The Standing Place of Abraham—the stone with the imprints of Abraham's feet—was at first put in a kneading trough near the Kaʿbah; then it was buried in the place where it is at present. It has a dome on four pillars where the people offer their prayers after the circumambulation.

There are a lot of details of various aspects of the Kaʿbah and other religious buildings attached to it. We have described here only the things which are necessary for understanding the verses of *ḥajj* and the Kaʿbah.

One of the specialities of this House—which God has blessed and made a guidance—is that no Muslim group has ever disagreed about it or its prestige, honor and respect.

Verses 98–101

The verses as is evident from thematic continuity, indicate that the People of the Book (a group of them—that is, the Jews—or a group of the Jews) disbelieved in the Divine Revelation, and hindered the believers from the way of God by trying to show that it was a crooked and unright way, and presenting to them the actually crooked misleading way as the way of God. They did so by creating doubts in the believers' minds, in order that the believers would see the truth as falsehood and the falsehood (to which they invited them) as truth. The preceding verses had pointed to the Jews' deviations, for example, their denial of the fact that all food was lawful to them before the revelation of the Torah, and their rejection of the abrogation of the previous *qiblah,* that is, Bayt al-Maqdis.

These verses therefore put the finishing touches to the preceding ones which had described the lawfulness of all food before the Torah and declared that the Kaʿbah was the first House appointed for the men. Now these verses admonish the Jews because they were constantly trying to create doubts and mislead the believers; also the verses warn the believers against following the advice of those unbelievers, because if they listened to their call, they would themselves become unbelievers; then they exhort and encourage them to hold fast to God so that they would be guided to the path of true faith and their guidance would continue for ever.

It has been narrated by Zayd b. Aslam (as al-Suyūṭī has reportedly[1] written in *Lubāb al-nuqūl*) as follows:

> Shāsh b. Qays, a Jew, saw some people of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj engaged in (friendly) talk, and he was incensed by what he saw of their friendship and unity after their (hereditary) enmity. Therefore, he ordered a young Jew (who was with him) to sit with them and remind them of the Battle of Buʿāth. He did and they started boasting and quarrelling with each other. The argument continued until two men—Aws b. Quraẓī from the Aws and Jabbār b. Sakhr from the Khazraj—jumped up and abused each other; the two groups were enraged and stood against each

1 Vide *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 4, Commentary of this verse. (Auth.)

other for fighting. The news reached the Messenger of God; he came and admonished them and established peace between them. They heeded his call and obeyed. Then God revealed about Aws and Jabbār: *O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who were given the Book …;* and about Shāsh b. Qays: *Say: O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allah?*

This tradition is abridged from the one narrated (by al-Suyūṭī) in *al-Durr al-manthūr* in detailed form from Zayd b. Aslam; he has narrated nearly similar traditions from Ibn ʿAbbās and others.

However, these verses obviously fit more properly on the explanation given by us than on this tradition. Moreover, they speak about disbelief and belief, and also about testimony of the Jews, recitation of the revealed verses to the believers, and things like that; and all these matters are more relevant to the explanation given by us. It is also supported by the words of God: *Many of the People of the Book wish that they could turn you back into unbelievers after your faith, out of envy on their part, (even) after the truth has become manifest to them* (2:109). Therefore, the fact is, as we have said, that these verses are a sort of prologue to the preceding ones.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ مَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

(3:98) *Say: O People of the Book! why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allah? and Allah is a witness of what you do.*

The continuation of the context indicates that "the communications" refers to the lawfulness of food before the revelation of the Torah and to the Kaʿbah being the *qiblah* in Islam.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءُ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

(3:99) *Say: O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allah? You seek (to make) it crooked, while you are witnesses, and Allah is not heedless of what you do.*

al-Ṣadd (to hinder; to divert); "you seek it," that is, you want this way

to be crooked; *iwajan* (crooked, perverted); it refers to the fact that they wanted the way of God to be deviated, not straight.

... while you are witnesses, and Allah is not heedless of what you do: You know very well that all food was lawful before the revelation of the Torah, and that one of the signs of the promised prophet was that he would change the *qiblah* to the Kaʿbah. The Jews have been counted as witnesses in this verse, while the preceding verse declared God to be a witness of their activities and disbelief. The implication of this fine juxtaposition cannot be lost on a man of literary taste. They are witnesses of the truth of what they deny; and God is a witness of their denial and disbelief. As "witnessing" was ascribe to them in this verse, the ending clause of the preceding verse (*And Allah is a witness of what you do*) was changed here to: "And God is not heedless of what you do". The implication is that they are witnesses for the truth of the Prophet's claim while God is a witness for everyone and everything.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تُطِيعُوا فَرِيقًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ يَرُدُّوكُمْ
بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كَافِرِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتُ
اللَّهِ وَفِيكُمْ رَسُولُهُ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْتَصِمْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ
مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

(3:100–101) ***O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who were given the Book, they will turn you back as unbelievers after you have believed. But how can you disbelieve while it is you to whom the communications of Allah are recited, and among you is His Messenger? And whoever holds fast to Allah, he indeed is guided to the straight path.***

As mentioned earlier, "A party," refers to the Jews or a Jewish group. "while it is you to whom the communications of God are recited, and among you is His Messenger": It is possible and easy for you to hold fast to the truth (which has been sent and explained to you) if you just listen to the verses recited to you and then meditate on them; then if you encounter any difficulty because of faulty meditation, you may to the Messenger of God for clarification; you may refer to the Messenger even before meditating on the verses to explain it to you: he is present among you, it is not difficult for you to approach him because he is neither hidden

nor far away from you; you may easily find the reality by referring to him, then you may clear the doubts which the Jews try to create in your minds. To hold fast to the Messenger of God and the Divine Communications is to hold fast to God; "And whoever holds fast to God, he indeed is guided to the straight path."

The disbelief, mentioned in the clause, "But how can you disbelieve" refers to disbelieving after believing; the clause, "while it is you to whom the communications of God are recited," points to the possibility of holding fast to the communications of God and the Messenger of God in order to protect oneself from disbelief; the clause, "And whoever holds fast to God," is a sort of the major premise of a syllogism, (the full form of which has been given above). The guidance to the straight path means being guided to the firmly-rooted true belief; it is the path that does not deviate nor does it fail to reach the destination; it keeps all those who proceed on it in proper line without letting them deviate hither or thither lest they go astray.

The Arabic word translated here as, "is guided," is a past tense in passive voice; it implies that they have been guided without realizing who has guided them.

The verse (3:101) shows that the Book of God and the verbal and practical guidance given by the Messenger of God are sufficient to guide a man to every truth and reality in which he could possibly go astray.

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Verses 102–110

The verses conclude the speech addressed to the believers, warning them of the People of the Book and their machinations. It reminds them that they have got a life-line which if they hold fast to they shall not perish, shall not go astray and shall not fall into pits of perdition. It is a speech branching from the preceding talk. However the previous context, that is, exposition of the behavior of the People of the Book, has not been concluded yet, as may be seen from the verses coming after these: *They shall by no means harm you but with a slight distress.*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ﴿١٠٢﴾

(3:102) *O you who believe! fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims.*

We have explained that *al-taqwā* (to be on guard; fear; piety) when related to God, means to be on guard against His punishment, to fear His chastisement. God says: *then be on guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel* (2:24). One may guard oneself from the Divine Wrath by behaving according to God's pleasure. In other words, it is doing what He has enjoined one to do, and abstaining from what He has forbidden; being grateful for His favors and patient when He puts one in adverse conditions. The last two attributes are actually two facets of gratefulness—because gratefulness is to put a thing in its proper place. In short, fear of God means that man should obey (and not disobey) Him, and should submit to Him in all that He bestows or withholds.

But the verse talks of *al-taqwā* as it rightfully should be done, that is, a piety that is not tainted by the least wrong. Such piety is the pure servitude which is never marred by an iota of obliviousness or heedlessness; it is obedience without disobedience, gratitude without ingratitude, remembrance without forgetfulness; it is the true Islam, that is, the highest grade of Islam. Accordingly, the words, *and do not die unless you are Muslims,* would mean: Continue on this condition of ideal *al-taqwā* until you die.

This verse gives a different ideal than the words: *Therefore fear Allah as much as you can* (64:16). This command enjoins man not to leave fear of

God in anything as much as he can. But ability differs from man to man according to people's strength, understanding and will. There is no doubt that the ideal piety is not within easy reach of a majority of men. There are, in this spiritual journey, many stations, locations and danger points which cannot be spotted except by those who know. Also there are many delicate points and subtle differences which cannot be recognized except by those who have been purified. There is many a stage of piety which a common man would say, was beyond human ability; he really believes it to be far above the human strength—while the truly pious people have long past that stage and are now progressing towards even more difficult goal, through much more harder terrains.

The verse, *Therefore fear Allah as much as you can,* has been so worded that different minds would interpret it in different ways, according to one's perceived strength and ability. This will provide a means to proceed to the real goal which is given in the verse under discussion: "fear God with the fear which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims." They will then understand that the main purpose is for them to take to the path of the ideal piety and to progress towards that lofty station. In this respect, it is not different from being guided to the Straight Path: Although all men are invited to it, only the true believers, the pure monotheists, get to that path.

The two verses (*fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him; fear Allah as much as you can*) then give the following connotation: All people are called and invited to the ideal piety; then they are told to proceed to that goal as much as they can, everyone according to his own ability and strength. In this way, all will come on the path of piety; but they will be in different stages and various stations according to their own understanding and ambition, coupled with the Divine help and support, that is, bestowed on deserving servants. (This is what one understands after pondering on the two verses.)

It is clear from the above explanation that the two verses are neither different from each other in meaning nor identical; rather, the first verse (*fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him*) points to the ultimate goal, while the second (*fear Allah as much as you can*) shows the way.

...and do not die unless you are Muslims: Death is a creative affair that is beyond the circle of our will and power. An order or a prohibition concerning this or similar things shall be a creative order or prohibition, as God says: *Then Allah said to them, Die* (2:243); *is only that He says to*

it, 'Be', and it is (36:82).

But sometimes an affair beyond our control is joined to one within our control, and then the combined phrase comes within our power, control and authority. At this stage, it may become a subject of legislative order or prohibition, as God says: *therefore you should not be of the doubters* (2:147); *and be not with the unbelievers* (11:42); *and be with the true ones* (9:119), and many similar verses. Obviously, "to be" is an intransitive creative affair upon which man has no control or power; but when it is joined with an action within his power, like doubting, disbelieving and holding fast to the true ones, it comes within our power; and then it may become subject of legislative order and prohibition.

In short, the prohibition that they should not die unless they are Muslims is a legislative one because the said proviso has made it a voluntary action; and it implies that man should hold fast to Islam in all conditions and at all times, until death comes to him in one of those conditions. Thus he would die on Islam.

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ
إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ
عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(3:103) ***And hold fast by the cord of Allah all together and be not divided and remember the bounty of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it; thus does Allah make clear to you His signs that you may follow the right way.***

God has said before to the believers: *But how can you disbelieve while it is you to whom the communications of Allah are recited and among you is His Messenger; and whoever holds fast to Allah, he indeed is guided to the straight path* (3:101). It had shown that holding fast to the communications of God and to His Messenger (the Book of God and the *sunnah* of the Prophet) is to hold fast to God; and whoever holds fast to God is safe and secure and his guidance is guaranteed; also holding fast to the Prophet is holding fast to the Book, because it is the Book itself that enjoins us to

do so: *and whatever the Messenger gives you, take it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep it back* (59:7).

Now the verse under discussion has changed the phraseology; instead of telling us to hold fast to God, it enjoins to hold fast to the cord of God. It shows that the cord of God is the Book revealed by God; it is the cord that joins the creature to his Lord, that connects the heavens to the earth. You may also say that the Divine Cord is the Qur'an and the Prophet because the end result of all is the same.

The Qur'an invites only to the ideal piety and firm Islam. Yet the aim of this verse is different from the preceding verse that had enjoined ideal piety and the death on Islam, inasmuch as that verse was concerned with guidance of the individual, while this looks at the good of the society. The words "All together" and "be not divided" point to this fact. The verse therefore orders the Muslim society to hold fast to the Book and the *sunnah,* as they had earlier enjoined the individual to do so.

...and remember the bounty of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren: The clause "when you were" explains the bounty of God, and the next clause, *and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it*, is in conjunction with it.

The order to remember this Divine bounty and favor is based on the established Qur'anic system: it builds its education on explanation of its reasons and causes; and invites to the good and the guidance through proper door; it does not demand blind following from its adherents. Far be it from the Divine Teaching to guide the people to eternal happiness that is useful knowledge and good deed—and then to tell them to wander in the darkness of ignorance and blind following.

But the reader is warned here not to confuse the subject matter. God teaches men the reality of their happiness and then shows them its proper way and reason, in order that they would understand the mutual relationship between the realities and know that all emanate from the fountainhead of monotheism. It continues side by side with men's obligation to totally submit to God because He is God, the Lord of the universe, and to hold fast to His cord because it is the cord of God Who is the Lord of the universe. The last two verses (*These are communications of Allah which we recite to you*) point to this fact.

In short, God has ordered them not to accept any word, nor to obey any order, except after knowing its reason. At the same time He has told

them to surrender totally to Him, giving for its reason the fact that He is God Who owns them totally and unconditionally, they have got nothing except that which God has willed for them and done for them; also He has ordered them to unconditionally obey what His Messenger has brought to them, giving for its reason the fact that he is His Messenger who conveys to them only that which he has been entrusted by God to do; then God explains to them the realities of knowledge and describes the ways of happiness, giving them a comprehensive reason in order that they could understand the inter-relation of the spiritual knowledge and the ways of happiness, and thus arrive at the root of monotheistic belief; it provides them with a Divine Training which enables them to think what is correct and speak what is true. Thus they would be alive with knowledge, free from blind following. Result: If they would understand the reason of any established religious reality (or any related thing) they would accept it; and if they did not understand they would not reject it outright; instead they would try to understand it by research and meditation without rejecting, or objecting to, it—because it is an established reality.

But it does not mean that one should not accept anything—even from God and His Messenger—without asking for its reason. Such a proposition would be the height of folly, as it would imply that God wants His creatures to demand for proof after the proof is given to them: His lordship and His ownership is the basic reason and argument that makes it incumbent on everyone to submit to Him and obey His command. Likewise, the messengership of His Messenger is the solid reason and proof to prove that whatever he says has come from God. Otherwise, we would have to say that God has no authority in that which He manages by His authority. Is it but a contradiction in terms? In short, the Islamic way and the prophetic method calls only to knowledge, and not to blind following as these so-called critics—who are nothing if not blind followers themselves—claim.

Perhaps that is why God has called it a favor (*the bounty of Allah on you*). It indicates the reason as to why We enjoin you to unite together: you have already experienced the bitterness of enmity and sweet taste of love and brotherhood; you have seen that you were on the brink of the pit of fire and God has saved you; We point this reason to you not because We have to support our sayings with some proof (obviously, Our saying is true whether We point to its reason or not), but only to let you know that it is a favor of Us on you, in order that you may appreciate that in this unity—like everything else We enjoin on you—lies your felicity, comfort

and success.

God has given here two proofs, one of which (… *you were enemies...*) is obviously based on their experience, while the other (… *you were on the brink of a pit of fire...*) is based on rational explanation.

The clause "so by His favor you became brethren" reminds the Muslims a second time of the Divine Favor mentioned in the preceding clause "And remember the bounty of God on you". The bounty and favor refers to their unity; hence the brotherhood too (which results from this bounty) refers to the same love and unity. The brotherhood, as used here, is therefore a claimed reality.

Also possibly it may be a reference to the brotherhood that has been legislated as between the believers, vide the verse: The believers are but brethren (49:10); this legislated brotherhood creates very important mutual rights and duties between one believer and the other.

...and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it: *Shafā ḥufratin* (brink or edge of a pit where one is in danger of falling down); "fire" may be of the hereafter or of this world. If former, then it would refer to the fact that previously they were unbelievers and about to fall down in the hell the moment they died and death is nearer to man than is the iris of eye from its white—then God saved them from it through the true faith. And if the aim is to point to their evil society which they were living in before they accepted Islam and became brethren, and the fire refers to their wars and conflicts—and it is a commonly used metaphor—then the meaning would be as follows:

A society built on disunited hearts and divergent minds cannot proceed under one leader or in one direction; it is bound to turn into a disorientated and deranged collection of people—each one pulling it to his side, as it suits his own wishes and desires. Such a society would be a cauldron of dissension and strife, always pushing its members to ever-new conflicts, embroiling them in wars and fights, and threatening them with decline and extinction. It is the fire that neither allows one to endure nor does it leave one alone, raging in the pit of ignorance from which no inmate could hope to escape.

The immediate audience of this verse, were the Muslims who before the verse was revealed, had accepted Islam after their disbelief. They had spent all their pre-Islamic lives in constant threat of battle and war. There was no security, no peace, no law and order. They did not understand what constituted public safety—the concept that covers the society in all

its aspects like property, honor and life, etc.

When they joined hands to hold fast to the cord of God, perceived the signs of happiness and felicity, and tasted the sweetness of Divine Bounties, they understood by this experience the truth and reality of what God reminds them of His pleasant favors and the resulting wholesome felicity. In this background, this speech was bound to win their hearts—as well as of the others—most effectively and in all totality.

That is why the call to unite has been based on their own experience and observation instead of just philosophical presumptions. One picture is worth a thousand words. And it is because of the same reason that the next warning (*And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear evidences had come to them …*) points to the condition of those who had preceded them. The believers have seen and heard what happened to those nations—how they declined and fell—because of their disunity and internal strife; the believers should learn lessons from them; they should not walk on the same path, should not proceed in the same direction.

Then God draws their attention to the special nature of this speech and says: *thus does Allah make clear to you His signs that you may follow the right way.*

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

(3:104) *And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful.*

Experience shows that the knowledge a man acquires in his life (and he acquires and preserves for himself only that which may be of some use to him) is soon forgotten if not repeatedly remembered, if not frequently put in practice and acted upon—it makes no difference how that knowledge was acquired and preserved. Also there is no doubt that action, in all its aspects, turns on the pivot of knowledge; its strength or weakness, its efficiency or deficiency all depends on the strength or weakness, efficiency or deficiency of knowledge. God has given a likeness of knowledge and action in the following verse: *And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth (abundantly) by the permission of its Lord, and (as for) that which is bad (its herbage) comes forth but scantily; thus do We repeat the*

communications fora people who give thanks (7:58).

Undoubtedly, there is an interaction between knowledge and action. Knowledge is the strongest motive of action, and action is the greatest teacher that imparts knowledge.

This reality binds a good society (that which has got useful knowledge and virtuous action) to preserve and keep intact their knowledge and culture; and obliges them to bring a deviator back to the right path, to make sure that nobody goes astray leaving the known way of righteousness for the unforgiving desert of evil—they must protect him from falling into the pit of sin and error by forbidding him to go near it.

This is the call to educate the society members; the obligation of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. It is this important obligation to which God refers when He says: "… who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong".

The Arabic words translated here as "right" and "wrong" (*enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong*) are *al-maʿrūf* and *al-munkar* which literally mean "known" and "unknown" respectively.[1] Ponder on the explanation given above and you will understand why God has used these expressions. The verse under discussion is based on the preceding one, *And hold fast by the cord of Allah all together and be not divide …* A society which follows this guidance must be the ideal society. It would only be the right and the good which they would recognize, which would be "known" to them; and only the wrong and the evil which they would not recognize, which would be "unknown" to them. If this fine point is not kept in mind, then the only possible explanation would be that the right and the wrong were respectively known and unknown in the eyes of religion—but not in actual practice of the society.

And from among you there should be a party: It has been said that "from among" indicates portion, obliging only a party among the Muslim *ummah* to enjoin the good and forbid the evil and call to the truth. Others have said that the particle *min* (from among) has here an explanatory connotation; that the sentence means as follows: If you unite together you will become a party who invite to good, enjoin the right and forbid the evil. In other words it is as we say: 'I should find in you a friend', which actually means: 'Be my friend'. Apparently, the said explanation of "from among"

1 May be a better literal translation for *al-ma'ruf* and *al-munkar* would be 'acknowledged' and 'not acknowledged' respectively. (Pub.)

means that the whole Muslim *ummah* is obligated to call to the good.

Actually, the controversy whether "from among" is for division or explanation is quite irrelevant. Calling to good, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong are things which, even when obligatory, cannot be obligatory except on a few; because once the goal is achieved it would not be necessary for others to do so. Even if we were to say that the whole *ummah* invited to good, enjoined the right and forbade the wrong, it would only mean that there were some people in the *ummah* who did so. Thus the responsibility lies on only a selected group in any case. If the verse is addressed to a group of the *ummah,* the matter is clear; but if it is addressed to the whole nation, that is because of that particular group. In other words, initially the responsibility lies on everybody's shoulders, but when some perform the duty, they get its reward and the others are then exempted from the obligation. That is why the verse ends with the clause "And these (that is, those who perform this duty) it is that shall be successful"

It appears from the above that "from among" indicates here a portion; it is this meaning that is generally understood from such combinations in common conversation, and it is not right to go for another meaning without a good reason.

The three—inviting to good, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong—are profoundly extensive subjects which require deep exegetic discourse, and we shall write about it, God willing, in proper places; also we shall deal there with its academic psychological and social aspects.

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

(3:105) ***And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear evidences had come to them, and these it is that shall have a grievous chastisement.***

Probably the clause, "After clear evidences had come to them," is an adverbial phrase related to the verb, "disagreed," only. If so, then the "disagreement" would refer to difference of belief while the "division" to their physical separation and dissociation. Division has been mentioned first, because it is the prelude to divergence of belief. As long as the members of a community remain in contact with each other, there continues a

harmony in their ideas and ideals, and their constant meetings—and the inevitable interaction—welds their beliefs into a single entity, protecting them from ideological differences. If on the other hand, they lose contact and become separated the process of mutual action and reaction comes to a standstill; their views and ideas start developing independently, each going his own way, and it does not take each group very long to develop its own views, ideals, theories and beliefs. It is in this way that ideological disagreements are born and unity of nations is shattered. It is as though God was warning the Muslims not to be like those who began their journey to disaster by separating from each other, losing mutual contacts and remaining aloof from the community, and ended by having different beliefs and divergent ideas.

God has mentioned in various places that this disagreement and difference springs from revolt and envy; for example: *And none differed about it but the very people who were given it, after clear signs had come to them, revolting among themselves* (2:213).

Of course, it is inevitable for ideas and opinions to differ, because knowledge and understandings differ from individual to individual; but at the same time it is essential for a society to remove that difference and bring back the deviators to the fold of unity. It is possible to remove the differences through various means; and if the *ummah* neglected this duty, it would in itself be a revolt which would throw them into perdition.

The Qur'an has given utmost importance to unity and forcefully warned the Muslims against disunity. Why? Because it knew which path this *ummah* would take; they would differ, disagree and disunite not only as the previous people did, but even more. A peculiarity of the Qur'anic style has already been mentioned in several places: When it emphatically warns against some pitfall, it serves as a prophecy that the Muslim *ummah* was going to fall into it, nevertheless; the more forceful the admonition, the more likely the people were to violate it. This difference and disunity was foretold by the Prophet as well as by the Qur'an; he (the Prophet) said that difference would creep into his *ummah,* then it would raise its head in the form of divergent sects; also he prophesied that the *ummah* would become divided as the Jews and the Christians were before. Some of those prophecies will be given under "Traditions".

History testifies to the truth of this prophesy. No sooner was the Prophet gone than the people scattered in all directions; they were divided into several sects, each accusing others of apostasy. This has been going

on since the days of the Companions to this time of ours. Every attempt at uniting two sects, results in the creation of a third.

Experience and analytical study of Islamic literature and history prove that the fount-head of this difference were the hypocrites. Read the Qur'an and you will see how forcefully it speaks against them and condemns them; how seriously it denounces their schemes; and how dangerous it takes their plans to be. Ponder on what God has said about them in the Chapters of: The Cow, The Repentance, The Confederates, and The Hypocrites, etc., and you will be stunned. This was their condition and behavior during the lifetime of the Messenger of God, when the revelations were regularly coming from God. But as soon as the Prophet departed, the hypocrites were immediately forgotten; we find no mention of them in the Muslim literature; it was as though they vanished the moment the Prophet died!

(It was) *as though there never was any intimate friend*
between al-Ḥujūn and al-Ṣafā,
Or there never conversed at night any talker at Mecca.

Soon the people found themselves scattered to the four winds and sectarian differences cut them asunder. Despotic and tyrannical governments succeeded in subjugating them, and their felicity of life was transformed into infelicity of error and straying. And we seek help from God. We hope, by the grace of God, to write on this subject in detail in the Chapter of "The Repentance."

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ ۚ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُمْ
بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ
ابْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(3:106-107) ***On the day when (some) faces shall become bright and (some) faces shall turn black; then as to those whose faces will have turned black: Did you disbelieve after your believing? Taste therefore the chastisement for what you were disbelieving. And as to those whose faces shall have become bright, they shall be in Allah's mercy; in it they shall abide.***

As the talk centres around ungratefulness which, like treachery and breach of trust, causes shame and bashfulness, God has selected here a chastisement of the hereafter that is analogous to it, that is, blackness of

face which metaphorically denotes shamefulness, abashment and disgrace. It is implied, or rather clearly shown, by the words of God: "then as for those whose faces will have turned black: Did you disbelieve after your believing?"

For the same reason, those who are grateful for this Divine Favor, shall be given a reward that will be appropriate for thankfulness, and that is brightness of face, which is metaphorically used for contentment and delight.

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

(3:108) ***These are communications of Allah which We recite to you with truth, and Allah does not desire any injustice to the creatures.***

The clause, "with truth" is related to the verb, "We recite," that is, the recitation is the recital of truth, it is not false, nor is it form Satanic whisperings. Alternatively, it may be related to "communications" giving it an adjectival meaning, that is, true communications. Or it may be related to a deleted word. In any case, the verse means as follows: These verses which describe what God will do with two groups—the ungrateful and the grateful—are accompanied by and based on truth, there is no falsehood or injustice in them. This meaning is more appropriate because the verse ends on the words: *and Allah does not desire any injustice …*

… and Allah does not desire any injustice to the creatures: The word "injustice," is a common noun used in a negative context, implies comprehensiveness, that is, every type of injustice is negated. Likewise "the creatures" being a plural with definite article "the" denotes comprehensiveness. Therefore, the meaning will be as follows: God does not desire any injustice—of what every type it may be—to any of His creatures or a group of creatures.

It is a fact that difference and conflict among the people is such a bad thing that its evil consequences adversely affect all the creatures, the whole mankind.

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(3:109) ***And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's; and to Allah all things are returned.***

After the declaration that God desires no injustice whatsoever, this

verse gives its reason to remove any possible misunderstanding to the contrary. God owns everything in all its aspects; He has right and authority to manage it in any way He likes. There is nothing outside His ownership. Had there been anything outside His ownership, only then He would do any injustice or exceed the limit by managing or usurping that "unowned" thing. Moreover, man inclines to injustice when he has a need which cannot be fulfilled except by manipulation of something he does not own. But God is Self-sufficient to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. (This argument has been given by an exegete, but it is not in conformity with apparent meaning of the verse. This reply is based on the Self-sufficiency of God, and not on His ownership, while the verse mentions the latter, not the former.) However, the Divine Ownership offers irrefutable proof that God is not unjust.

Then comes another proof: Everything and every affair, whatsoever it may be, returns to God. If anyone other than God would have had any authority on any thing. or affair, only then God would have been committing injustice if He would have removed it from that other's authority and manipulated it according to His own will. This proof is pointed at in the concluding statement: "And to God all things are returned".

The two proofs, as you see, are complementary. One is based on the premise that everything belongs to God, and the other on the principle that no affair belongs to anyone other than God.

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۗ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۚ مِنْهُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

(3:110) ***You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and you believe in Allah; and if the People of the Book had believed it would have been better for them; of them (some) are believers and most of them are transgressors.***

The word translated as "raised up" is *ukhrijat* (lit. taken out); it has a connotation of introduction. Taking out also implies incidence, bringing forth and creation. God says: *And Who brought forth herbage* (87:4). The verse is addressed to the believers; therefore, the word "men" should mean

general public, the humanity at large.

Someone has said that the verb, *kuntum* (lit. you were), is devoid of time factor and means 'you are'. The word *ummah* (nation, group), is used for a party as well as for individual—when they have the same goal which they aim to reach; it is derived from *al-amm* (to intend, to aim). The clause, "And you believe in God," has been placed after mentioning the enjoining the right and forbidding the evil; it is like mentioning the whole thing or the root after describing some components or branches. According to the above explanation, the verse means as follows: O Muslims! you are the best group which God has brought out for the mankind by guiding it; because you are united, you believe in God, and perform the twin duties of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. Obviously, this honored title has been given to the whole *ummah* only because some of them have attained to the true belief and do fulfil the obligations of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. This is in short what some exegetes have written about it.

But obviously the word *kuntum* (you were), is not devoid of time factor; it is a past tense and refers to the believer's condition in the early days of Islam. It speaks about those who were foremost among the Emigrants and the Helpers; the belief here refers to their positive response to the call of holding fast to the cord of God without being divided; this belief is opposite of the disbelief in that call—the disbelief that is mentioned in the words: *Did you disbelieve after your believing?* The same is the import of the belief as related to the People of the Book in this verse, "And if the People of the Book had believed." In short the meaning will be as follows:

O Muslims! you were—when you were brought forth first of all and appeared for the people—the best group that was ever formed, because at that time you enjoined good and forbade evil, and holding fast by the cord of God you became united and unified like one body and one soul; and if the People of the Book too were like that it would have been better for them, but they are divided and disunited—some of them are believers while most of them are transgressors.

Many times in these verses the talk switches from third to the second person, and from plural to the singular number, and vice versa. Also there are clauses where noun has been used instead of pronoun, for example, the Divine Name "God" has been repeated several times. The reasons for these changes are not difficult to find after meditation.

Examining Narrations

(1) Abū Baṣīr says: "I asked Abū ʿAbdillāh about the words of God, *fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him*, and he said: 'He should be obeyed, and not disobeyed; remembered, and not forgotten; and thanked, and not shown ingratitude.' " (*Maʿāni al-akhbār; al-Tafsīr,* al-ʿAyyāshī)

(2) al-Ḥākim and Ibn Marduwayh have narrated through another chain from Ibn Masʿūd that he said: "The Messenger of God said: *'Fear Allah as He should be feared;* (it means) that He should be obeyed and not disobeyed, and remembered, and not forgotten.' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(3) al-Khaṭīb narrates from Anas that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'No servant fears God with the fear which is due to Him until he knows that what has befallen him could not miss him, and what has missed him could not reach him.' " (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: We have explained in the Commentary how the meaning given in the first two traditions could be inferred from the verse. As for the third one, it gives a concomitant of the Qur'anic meaning, and it is clear.

(4) Ibn Shahrāshūb quotes from *al-Tafsīr* of Wakīʿ that ʿAbd Khayr said: "I asked ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib about the words of God: *O you who believe! fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him,* (and) he said: 'By God, no one acted upon it except the House of the Messenger of God; we remembered Him, so we do not forget Him; and we thanked Him, so we are never ungrateful to Him; and we obeyed Him, so we never disobeyed Him. When this verse was revealed, the Companions said: "We are unable to do it." Then God revealed, *Therefore fear Allah as much as you can*. Wakīʿ said: "that is, as much as you are able to do." (*al-Burhān* [*fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*], al-Bahrānī)

(5) Abū Baṣīr said: "I asked Abū ʿAbdillāh about the words of God, *fear Allah with the fear which is due to Him*. He said: '(It is) abrogated.' I said: And which (verse) abrogated it? He said: 'The words of God, Therefore fear Allah as much as you can.' (*al-Tafsīr*, al-Ayyāshī)

Author's comment: It may be inferred from the tradition of Wakīʿ that "Abrogation" (as mentioned in the tradition of al-ʿAyyāshī) refers to

various stages of piety and fear of God. But it does not mean abrogation in the sense of cancellation (as some exegetes have said) because it is against the apparent meaning of the Qur'an.

(6) al-Ṣādiq explained the clause, *unless you are Muslim*s, in these words: "unless you are submissive." (*Majmaᶜ al-bayān*)

(7) al-Suyūṭī writes under the words of God: *And hold fast by the cord of Allah …:* "Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Abū Saᶜīd al-Khudrī that he said: 'The Messenger of God said: "The Book of God, it is the cord of God (which is) outstretched from the heaven to the earth." ' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(8) Ibn Abī Shaybah narrates from Abū Shurayḥ al-Khuzāᶜī that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'Surely this Qur'an is a rope, one end of which is in the hand of God, and the other end is in your hands; therefore hold fast to it; because you shall never slip nor will you ever go astray after (holding fast to) it.' " (*ibid.*)

(9) al-Sajjād said, *inter alia,* in a hadith*:* "And the cord of God—it is the Qur'an." (*Maᶜāni al-akhbār*)

Author's comment: There are other traditions on this theme, narrated by both sects.

(10) al-Bāqir said: "The progeny of Muḥammad, they are the cord of God which He has ordered (the believers) to hold fast to; so He has said: *And hold fast by the cord of Allah all together and be not divided*." (*al-Tafsīr*, al-ᶜAyyāshī)

Author's comment: There are other traditions of the same meaning; they are supported by what has been written in the Commentary; also other traditions given below, support it.

(11) al-Ṭabarānī has narrated from Zayd b. Arqam that he said: "The Messenger of God, said: 'Surely, I am to depart from you; and surely you are to come to me near the *ḥawḍ* (reservoir, that is, of *al-Kawthar*). Therefore be careful how you follow me about the two weighty things.' He was asked: And what are the two weighty things? O Messenger of God!' He said: 'The greater one is the Book of God, the Mighty, the Great, (it is) a rope one end of which is in the hand of God and (another) end is in your hands; therefore hold fast to it, you shall never slip up nor will you ever go astray. And the smaller one is my progeny. And surely they will never separate from each other until they reach me near the water reservoir; and I have asked for them this (speciality) from

my Lord; therefore do not precede them lest you be destroyed; and do not (try to) teach them because they are more knowledgeable than you .' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: The tradition of the "Two Weighty Things" is among the *mutawātir* ones, which has been narrated unanimously by both the Sunnīs and the Shīᶜahs. We have mentioned in the beginning of the chapter that some scholars of traditions have narrated it from thirty-five different narrators—males and females—and a multitude of narrators and scholars have narrated it from those original narrators.

(12) Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated from Anas that the said: "The Messenger of God said: 'The Children of Israel became divided into seventy-one sects, and surely my *ummah* will soon be divided into seventy-three sects—all of them shall be in the fire except one.' They said: 'O Messenger of God! and who is this one?' He said: 'The party.' Then he recited: *And hold fast to the cord of Allah all together.*' " (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: This too is one of the famous traditions. The Shīᶜahs have narrated it in a different way, as may be seen in *al-Khiṣāl*, *Maᶜāni al-akhbār*, *al-Iḥtijāj*, *al-Amālī*, the *Kitāb* of Sulaym b. Qays and *al-Tafsīr* of al-ᶜAyyāshī. We quote it here from the first-named book. al-Ṣadūq narrates through his chains from Sulaymān b. Mihrān who narrates from Jaᶜfar b. Muḥammad who narrates, through his forefathers, from the Leader of the Faithful that he said: "I heard the Messenger of God saying: 'Verily, the *ummah* of Moses became divided after him, into seventy-one sects, one of them (was) saved, and seventy (were thrown) into the fire. And the *ummah* of Jesus became divided after him, into seventy-two sects, one of them (was) saved, while seventy-one (were thrown) into the fire. And surely my *ummah* will soon be divided after me, into seventy-three sects, one of them (will be) saved, and seventy-two (will be thrown) into the fire."

Author's comment: It conforms with the next tradition.

(13) Abū David, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim (who has confirmed correctness of this hadith) have all narrated from Abū Hurayrah that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects; and the Christians were divided into seventy-two sects; and my *ummah* will be divided into seventy-three sects.' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: This theme is found in other traditions narrated

through other chains from Muʿāwiyah and others.

(14) al-Ḥākim has narrated from Ibn ʿUmar that he said: "The Messenger of God said: "There will happen in any *ummah* all that happened in the Children of Israel in a completely identical manner, so much so that if there were among them someone who had openly had incestuous relation with his mother, there would be someone like that in my *ummah* too. Verily the Children of Israel were divided into seventy-one sects, and my *ummah* will become divided into seventy-three sects all of them (will go) into the fire except one.' He was asked: 'Which one?' He said: 'That on which are I and my Companions today.' "(*ibid.*)

Author's comment: A similar tradition has been narrated in *Jāmiʿ al-uṣūl* (by Ibn al-Athīr) from al-Tirmidhī, on the authority of the son of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ from the Prophet.

(15) al-Ṣadūq has narrated through his chains from Ghiyāth b. Abraham, from al-Ṣādiq (through his forefathers, peace be on them all) that he said: "The Messenger of God said: All that happened in the previous nations will surely happen in this *ummah* in a completely identical manner and exactly alike way." (*Kamāl al-dīn*)

(16) The Prophet said: "Most surely you will follow the customs of those who were before you, in a completely identical manner and exactly alike way; you will not deviate from their path; you will imitate them faithfully (in every conceivable manner), span to span, hand to hand and arm to arm; so much so that if someone in previous nations had entered an iguana's den, you will surely enter it." They said: "Do you mean the Jews and the Christians? O Messenger of God!" He said: "Who (else) do I mean? Surely you will unravel the rope of Islam strand by strand; the first thing you will destroy of your religion shall be trustworthiness, and the last of it (to go, shall be) the prayer." (*al-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

(17) The author of *Jāmiʿ al-uṣūl* has narrated on the authority of the correct books—also al-Tirmidhī has narrated it—from the Prophet that he said: "By Him in Whose hand my soul is, most surely you will follow the custom of those who were before you." And Razīn has added the words: "in a completely identical manner and exactly similar way; so much so that if there were among them one who had cohabited with his mother, someone among

you too would do so. But I do not know whether you would worship calf or not."

Author's comment: This too is a famous tradition. The Sunnīs have narrated it in their correct and other books, while the Shīʿahs have recorded it in their collections of traditions.

(18) Anas said: "The Messenger of God said: 'Surely there will arrive at the Reservoir a group of my Companions, until when they shall be removed (from there) they shall tremble before me. So I shall say: O Lord! my Companions.' Then it will be said: 'You do not know what they did do after you.' " (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhāri; *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim)

(19) Abū Hurayrah said that the Messenger of God said. "There will arrive near me on the Day of Resurrection a group of my Companions (or according to another report: of my *ummah*), and they will be evicted from the Reservoir. Then I will say: 'O Lord! my Companions.' And (God) will say: 'You have no knowledge of what they did do after you; they became apostates, going backwards (to their previous disbelief).' Then they will be evicted." (*ibid.*)

Author's comment: This tradition also is very well-known; both the Sunnīs and the Shīʿahs have recorded it in their correct books and collections, on the authority of many Companions, like Ibn Masʿūd, Anas, Sahl b. Sāʿid, Abū Hurayrah, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, ʿĀʾishah, Umm Salmah, Asmāʾ bint Abī Bakr, and others, and also from some Imams of the *Ahl al-bayt*.

These traditions, numerous and varied as they are, confirm what we have inferred from the verses; and the historical events and strifes confirm these traditions.

(20) al-Ḥākim has narrated (and confirmed its correctness) that Ibn ʿUmar said: "Verily the Messenger of God said: 'Whoever went out of community about a hand-span, he surely removed the collar of Islam from his neck—until he returns. And whoever died without having a leader of community over him, then surely his death shall be a death of ignorance (that is, disbelief).' " (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

Author's comment: The theme of this hadith too is well-known. Both the Sunnīs and the Shīʿahs have narrated from the Prophet that he said: "Whoever died without knowing the Imam of his time, he died the death

of ignorance (that is, disbelief)."

(21) It is recorded in the *Sunans* of al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dawūd that the Prophet said: "There shall always be a group of my *ummah* on truth." (*Jāmiᶜ al-uṣūl*)

(22) The Leader of the Faithful (ᶜAlī) said about the words of God: *Did you disbelieve after your believing?:* "They are the people of innovations and heretic tendencies and wrong views from this *ummah. (Majmaᶜ al-bayān)*

(23) Abū ᶜAmr al-Zubayrī narrates from al-Ṣādiq about the words of God: *You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men,* that he said: "(God) means the *ummah* (group, nation) for which the prayer of Abraham was granted; and they are the people God raised (His Messenger) among them, and from them and to them; and they are the medium nation, and they are the best nation that has been raised up for the people." (*Majmaᶜ al-bayān; al-Tafsīr,* al-ᶜAyyāshī)

Author's comment: We have explained this tradition under the Commentary of the following verse: … *and* (raise) *from our offspring a group submitting Thee* (2:128).

(24) Ibn Abī Ḥātim has narrated from Abū Jaᶜfar that he said about the verse: *You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men …:* "The People of the House of the Prophet." (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(25) Aḥmad has narrated through good chains from ᶜAlī that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'I have been given that which no prophet was given: I have been helped with awe, and I have been given keys of the earth, and I have been named Aḥmad, and the earth has been made a means of cleansing for me, and my *ummah* has been made the best nation." (*ibid.*)

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Verses 111–120

The verses, as you see, now revert to the original theme, describing the behavior of the People of the Book—and particularly the Jews—exposing their disbelief in the Divine Revelation, their going astray and their hindering the believers from the way of God; the preceding ten verses were a talk within talk, a parenthetical speech. The verses are thus connected with the foregoing discourse.

لَنْ يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّا أَذًى ۖ وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُوَلُّوكُمُ الْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

(3:111) ***They shall by no means harm you but with a slight distress; and if they fight you they shall turn (their) backs to you, then they shall not be helped.***

al-Adhā (slight distress) denotes a harm suffered by a creature, either to his soul or body or to those related to him, be it of this world or of the hereafter—as al-Rāghib has said in *Mufradāt al-Qur'an.*

ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا ثُقِفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٍ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ

(3:112) ***Abasement is brought down upon them wherever they are found, except under a protection from Allah and a protection from men, and they have become settled in wrath from Allah, and humiliation is stamped upon therm; this is because they used to disbelieve in the signs of Allah and slew the prophets unjustly; this is because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limits.***

al-Dhillah (abasement) denotes here species of abasement; *al-dhull* is the humiliation imposed by someone else; *al-dhill* is that which results from one's own obstinacy—as al-Rāghib has written. However, its general import is the condition of humiliation and degradation. Its opposite *al-ʿizz* means honor, strength and pride.

The word *thuqifū* means "are found"; *al-ḥabl* literally means rope or cord which provides protection to one who holds fast to it; it is metaphorically

used to everything that provides a kind of safety, security and protection, example, a covenant, guarantee or amnesty. The meaning is as follows—and God knows better: Abasement is stamped on them as a design is stamped on a coin, or it encompasses them as a tent encompasses a man. Anyhow, they are either branded with, or overwhelmed by abasement and humiliation—except when they get a protection or guarantee from God and a protection or guarantee from men.

The word "protection" is repeated when referring to God and then to men, because the connotation differs from one place to the other. Protection given by God is His decree and command, either creative or legislative; and that provided by men is their decision and action.

Abasement is stamped on them; it means that God has ordained a law affirming their abasement. This meaning is supported by the proviso "wherever they are found". Obviously, it means that wherever the believers find them and subjugate them; this proviso is obviously more appropriate to legislative abasement, one of whose effects is the imposition of *jizyah*.

The meaning of the verse therefore is as follows:

They are abased and humiliated, according to the law of Islamic shariah, except when they come under the protection of an Islamic State, or somehow get protection from people.

One of the exegetes has said that the clause "Abasement is brought down upon them" is not a legislative order; it is rather a statement of fact describing what they had suffered by the Divine decree and measure—because when Islam came, the Jews were paying *jizyah* to the fire-worshippers of Persia, and some of them were subjects of the Christians.

Comment: This meaning could be correct; and the end portion of the verse might even support this view, because it apparently explains the reason of their being branded with abasement and humiliation in terms of their misdeeds, e.g., their disbelief in the signs of God, their slaying the prophets and their continuous transgression. But then we would have to apply this verse exclusively to the Jews—and there is apparently nothing in the verse to suggest such exclusiveness. We shall write some more on this subject under the following verse: *and We have put enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Resurrection* (5:64).

...and they have become settled in wrath from Allah, and humiliation is stamped upon them: *Bāʾū* (they settled in; they returned with); *al-maskanah* translated here as humiliation, literally means extreme poverty. Apparently it is used when a man finds no way of escape from a threatening poverty

or need. Accordingly the end of the verse conforms with its beginning.

...this is because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limits: They disobeyed, and, even before that, they were habitually and continuously transgressing the limits.

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً ۗ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ
وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾
وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

(3:113–115) ***They are not all alike; of the People of the Book there is an upright party; they recite Allah's communications in the night-time and they prostrate (to Him). They believe in Allah and the last day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and they strive with one another in hastening to good deeds, and those are among the good. And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it, and Allah knows the pious ones.***

al-Sawā (literally, to be equal) is a *maṣdar* which is used in the meaning of adjective, that is, equal, alike. The People of the Book are not all alike in their behavior, nor in the rules applying to them; there is among them an upright group whose attributes the verse describes. Obviously, the phrase "of the People of the Book there is …" shows the reason as to why the People of the Book are not all alike.

Various meanings have been given for the word *qāʾimah* (literally, standing; translated here as upright): It is said that it means 'firm in obeying the command of God', or 'just', or 'proceeding on straight path'. The fact is that the word is of a general nature which could be interpreted in any of the above meanings. But the mention of the Book and of their good deeds makes it certain that it has been used here in the meaning of being standing or firm in belief and obedience.

Ānā is plural of *inan* or *anan* or reportedly *anū*, all of which mean "time".

al-Musāraᶜah (to vie with one another in hastening); it is on paradigm of *al-mufāᶜalah* from the root verb *al-Surᶜah* (to be fast, to make haste). It is explained in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* as follows:

"The difference between *al-Surᶜah* and *al-ajalah* is as follows:

> *al-Surʿah* is to go ahead in a matter in which going ahead is allowed; it is a praiseworthy trait, and its opposite is *al-ibṭā* (to be late) which is a disliked action. And *al-ajalah* is to go ahead in a matter in which one should not go ahead; it is a disliked trend, and its opposite is *al-anāh* (deliberateness) which is a good trait."

Apparently, *al-Surʿah* is an attribute of movement, while *al-ajalah* shows an attribute of the one who moves.

al-Khayrāt means good deeds in general—be it worship, or spending in the way of God, or justice or looking after the needs of needy persons. It is a plural with prefix *al* which denotes comprehensiveness. It is mostly used for monetary good deeds, as its singular *al-khayr* (good) is mostly used for wealth and property.

In these verses, God has enumerated most of the basic good attributes, that is, belief, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and hastening towards good deeds; then He has praised them that they are among the good people. It means that they are the people of the straight path, and among the companions of the prophets, the truthful ones and the martyrs. Read, for proof, the following verses: *Guide us to the straight path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors, not of those inflicted with Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray* (1:6–7); in conjunction with: *And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good ones; and excellent are these as companions* (4:69).

It has been said that the verses under discussion refer to ʿAbdullāh b. Salām and his companions.

And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it* (lan yukfarūh[1]), *and Allah knows the pious ones: God will reward them for whatever good they do, they will receive its recompense from God, He will not let it be lost; He says: *and whoever on his own accord does good, then surely Allah is Grateful, Knowing* (2:158). Also He says: *and whatever good thing you spend, it is to your own good; … and whatever good thing you spend shall be paid back to you in full, and you shall not be wronged* (2:272).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْأَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا ۖ

1 *Lan yukfarūh* (they shall never be denied it); the root word is *al-kufrān* (ungratefulness) which is opposite of *al-Shukr* (gratefulness). (Auth.)

وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾

(3:116) ***(As for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allah; and these are the inmates of the fire; therein they shall abide.***

The continuation of context apparently shows that the phrase "those who disbelieve" refers to the other groups of the People of the Book which did not respond to the call of the Prophet; those were the people who used to hatch conspiracies against Islam and had left no stone unturned in extinguishing the light of the truth.

Some people have said that this verse refers to the idol-worshippers; according to them, it paves the way for the story of the Battle of Uḥud which comes after a few verses. But this explanation does not take into account the next statements, that is, *and you believe in the Book* (in) *the whole of it, and when they meet you they say: We believe …* Obviously it describes the Jews' behavior with the Muslims, not that of the idol-worshippers. It proves that the context is the same; it has not changed yet. An exegete has tried to combine both explanations by applying the verse under discussion to the idolaters and the next one to the Jews. But it is a mistake.

مَثَلُ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ فِي هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٍ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتْ حَرْثَ قَوْمٍ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَأَهْلَكَتْهُ ۚ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

(3:117) ***The likeness of what they spend in this life of the world is as the likeness of a wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the tilth of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it; and Allah does no injustice to them, but they are doing injustice to themselves.***

al-Ṣirr is intense cold. What they spend has been qualified with the proviso "in this life of the world" to indicate that they are completely cut off from the life of the hereafter; whatever they spend is related only to this life. The smitten tilth is qualified by the phrase "of a people who have done injustice to their souls" this proviso perfectly meshes with the coming statement, "And God does no injustice to them".

The verse means that whatever they spend in this life (in order to

better their conditions and achieve their evil goals) brings nothing to them except infelicity and unhappiness; it destroys what they ardently desire and which they think would bring happiness to them. It is like an intensely cold wind that smites the farm produce of an unjust people; it is because they had done injustice to their own selves—after all, an evil deed can bring only evil results.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بِطَانَةً مِنْ دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِي صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ ۚ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ ۖ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾

(3:118) ***O you who believe! do not take for intimate friends from among others than your own people; they do not fall short of inflicting loss upon you; they love what distresses you; vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater still; indeed, We have made the signs clear to you, if you would understand.***

Intimate friend has been called *al-biṭānah* (inner lining of a garment)—that is, opposite of *al-ẓihārah* (outer side of a garment)—because such a friend knows the inner thoughts and secrets of man; "they do not fall short," that is, they leave no stone unturned; *khabālan* (harm, mischief); insanity is called *al-khabl* because it harms or destroys understanding; "they love what distresses you": "what" in this sentence is for *maṣdar*, and it means: they love your distress, your grievous harm; "vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths": it means that their enmity and hatred is very obvious from their way of talking, from slips of their tongues; it is a fine metaphor; the verse does not describe what they have kept hidden in their hearts, it just says: "And what their breasts conceal is greater still"; this apparent vagueness indicates that the hatred hidden in their hearts is so varied and so great that it is beyond description—this vagueness puts even greater stress on the word "greater".

هَا أَنْتُمْ أُولَاءِ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ وَإِذَا لَقُوكُمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ ۚ قُلْ مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾

(3:119) ***Lo! you are they who will love them while they do not love you, and you believe in the Book (in) the whole of it; and when they meet you they say: We believe, and when they are alone, they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you. Say: Die in your rage; surely Allah knows what is in the breasts.***

Apparently *ūlāʾi* (they, these) is demonstrative pronoun, and *hā* (lo!) is exclamatory particle, and between the two has been inserted the pronoun "you"; the meaning thus will be, 'you these', as we say 'Zayd this did so', or 'Hindah this did so'.

The article *al* (the) in "the Book" denotes genes, that is, you believe in all the Books which have been revealed by God—your Book as well as their Books—while they do not believe in your Book.

The clause "And when they meet you they say: 'We believe,' " shows that they are hypocrites; "And when they are alone, they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you": *al-ʿaḍḍ* (to bite forcefully); *al-anāmil* is plural of *al-unmulah* (fingertip); *al-ghayẓ* (rage, wrath, anger); to bite fingertips against something proverbially expresses one's anger or sorrow on that thing.

The clause, *Say: Die in your rage*, is a curse against them in the form of command. It connects the foregoing sentences to the next one "surely God knows what is in the breasts". The meaning together will be as follows: "O God! cause them to die in their rage; surely Thou knowest what is in the breasts, that is, what is in their hearts or souls."

إِنْ تَمْسَسْكُمْ حَسَنَةٌ تَسُؤْهُمْ وَإِنْ تُصِبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا ۖ وَإِنْ
تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

(3:120) ***If a good befall you, it grieves them, and if an evil afflicts you, they rejoice at it; and if you are patient and guard yourselves, their scheme will not injure you in any way; surely Allah comprehends what they do.***

al-Masāʾah (to grieve) is opposite of *al-Surūr* (to make happy; happiness). The verse shows that the believers may protect themselves only if they have patience and piety.

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.